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Armed Peace:
The British Foreign Office and the Soviet Union, 1945 to 1953

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of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the Northern Department of the British Foreign Office and its perception of, and attitude towards, the Soviet Union between 1945 and 1953. In these formative years after World War II many assumptions and policies were shaped that proved decisive for years to come. The Northern Department of the Foreign Office was at the centre of British dealings with the Soviet Union after 1945 in an atmosphere of cooling diplomatic relations between both camps. Keeping channels of communications open in order to exploit every opportunity for negotiation and the settlement of post-war issues, officials built up an extensive expertise of Soviet domestic and foreign policy. Their focus on all aspects of Soviet life accessible to them, for example, Soviet domestic and international propaganda, revealed in their view a significant emerging future threat to British interests in Europe and worldwide. This view provided the basis of the analysis of new information and the assessment of the best possible policy options for the British government. The Northern Department tried to exploit those traits of Soviet policy that could persuade the USA and Western Europe to follow British foreign policy initiatives vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in the early Cold War while attempting to balance those weaknesses that could harm this effort.

The focus of the Department often varied as a result of Soviet action. Some issues, like the Cominform were of momentary importance while other issues, like the Communist threat and the issue of Western European defence remained on the agenda for many years. A realistic approach to foreign policy allowed officials to exploit and counter-act those Soviet foreign policies seen as most threatening to Britain and those most likely to aid Britain's recovery of her much desired world role. While the initial optimism after 1945 soon faded and consolidation on both sides was followed by confrontation, officials in London and the embassy in Moscow tried to maintain diplomatic relations to aid Western recovery efforts and support the new foreign policy doctrine of containment. When by the early 1950s entrenchment was speeding up in East and West, the Northern Department nevertheless utilised the available information to support British foreign policy worldwide as well as strengthen the domestic effort to explain the increasing international tension to the British people. Realism on the part of officials, and awareness of the information and options available to them meant that a Britain closely allied to the USA but one that continued to talk to the Kremlin was seen as the best way to achieve a continued world role for Britain and a safe Europe.

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Declaration

This thesis comprises my own work, unless otherwise acknowledged, and has not previously been submitted for examination in any other form.

Signed.....

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the references and the bibliography:

Primary sources:

DBPO	Documents on British Policy Overseas
TNA	The National Archives

Additional Abbreviations:

ACC	Allied Control Council in Germany
AUS	Assistant Under-Secretary
CCGC	Control Council for Germany College
CFM	Conferences of Foreign Ministers
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
COS	Chiefs of Staff
DUS	Deputy Under-Secretary
EAC	European Advisory Commission
EDC	European Defence Community
ERP	European Recovery Programme
FO	Foreign Office
FORD	Foreign Office Research Department
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
IDC	Imperial Defence College
IRD	Information Research Department
JIB	Joint Intelligence Bureau
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, German Communist Party
MOD	Ministry of Defence
ND	Northern Department
OMG	Office of the Military Governor in Berlin
PHPS	Post Hostilities Planning Staff
PRC	People's Republic of China
PUS	Permanent Under-Secretary
PUSC	Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee
PUSD	Permanent Under-Secretary's Department
PWE	Political Warfare Executive
RC	Russia Committee
RST	Review of Soviet Tactics
SBZ	Soviet Occupied Zone of Germany
SCC	Staff College Camberley
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> , the East German Communist Party
SISFP	Summary of Indications of Soviet Foreign Policy
SMAD	Soviet Military Administration in Germany
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> , German Social Democratic Party
SWWPI	Soviet Worldwide Policy and Intentions
TCP	Trends in Communist Policy
UNO	United Nations Organisation

Journal Titles:

AAAG	Annals of the Association of American Geographers
AJPS	American Journal of Political Science
CBH	Contemporary British History
CWH	Cold War History
DS	Diplomacy and Statecraft
EAS	Europe-Asia Studies
EEH	Explorations in Economic History
EEQ	East European Quarterly
HJ	Historical Journal
HT	History Today
INS	Intelligence and National Security
IA	International Affairs
IS	International Security
ISQ	International Studies Quarterly
JCH	Journal of Contemporary History
JIA	Journal of International Affairs
JIS	Journal of International Studies
JMGS	Journal of Modern Greek Studies
JMH	Journal of Military History
JMH	The Journal of Modern History
MES	Middle Eastern Studies
PAPS	Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science
PHR	Pacific Historical Review
PS	Political Psychology
RIS	Review of International Studies
RP	Review of Politics
RR	Russian Review
SL	Slavic Review
SS	Soviet Studies
TCBH	Twentieth Century British History

Part One. Introduction

The Foreign Office in the historiography

Detailed study of the Northern Department of the British Foreign Office in the crucial years after World War II offers a fascinating insight into the work of a Foreign Office department that was little known yet highly influential. This was a time when Britain as well as the USA and the Soviet Union tried to understand, and exploit, their place in the new post-war world order. For the Foreign Office the years after 1945 were challenging. Under a new Labour administration it came under pressure from other Whitehall ministries, like the Treasury, and the Chiefs of Staff of the Ministry of Defence, to give more consideration to their opinions in the planning and execution of British foreign policy. Facing an increasingly difficult international scene, Foreign Office officials were determined to make the best use of the information and influence available to them to suggest and support policy initiatives which in their view offered the most realistic path for Britain to maintain and enhance its interests worldwide.¹ Information was crucial; then as now the relationship between original information and intelligence, and its eventual use by the government has to be borne in mind when assessing the appropriateness and efficiency of British foreign policy. Despite its central place in the assessment and formation of British foreign policy versus an increasingly confident and dominant Soviet adversary the Northern Department, as the central point for information, analysis and discussion of foreign policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, has received surprisingly little attention from historians.

Although the available literature on the Foreign Office continues to grow, it is significantly under-researched for a government department of its size and importance. Many works on British foreign policy concentrate on the Cabinet level of debate and decision-making. Others discuss British foreign policy within closely defined parameters, such as the Cold War, decolonisation and imperial decline or the emergence of the European Union. Few place the Foreign Office at the heart of their argument and thus lose out on fully exploring and discussing the impact of it for British foreign policy. A few books

¹ Interference from outside departments is an issue which continues to exasperate Foreign Office staff, Christopher Meyer, former British ambassador to the USA in *The Sunday Times*, 18.10.2009.

published in the decades after 1945, nevertheless, made a tentative start.² Access to documents was difficult or impossible, and the discussion of important memoranda and developments was thus very limited. These studies were, however, extremely useful for their descriptions of the internal processes both in the Foreign Office and the British embassies abroad. Written at the height of the Cold War and within the orthodox discussion of British foreign policy the Foreign Office, possibly inadvertently, came off lightly. Later studies have benefited greatly from the continued release of files to The National Archives in Kew and the Freedom of Information initiative, and have offered new ways of understanding the process of foreign policy formation in Britain. As a result a more thorough re-evaluation of the role of the Foreign Office has been going on since the 1980s.

Despite prevailing restrictions on the study of original documents Victor Rothwell in *Britain and the Cold War, 1941 to 1947*, written in 1982, offered the first comprehensive new assessment of the Foreign Office.³ Set, as the title suggests, within the historiography of the Cold War and revisionist attempts to situate Britain's role and responsibility within that conflict, it was a landmark study. Starting his examination during the war when Britain had no choice but to edge closer to cooperation with the Soviet Union, he stopped when most historians agree the Cold War became a reality and the short years of cooperation finally ended. After the praising and often rather admiring words of previous historians, Rothwell was critical of the Foreign Office. Particularly the continued efforts to come to some form of *modus vivendi* with Stalin after 1945, officials' apparent passiveness and the perceived failure to realise that there was no monolithic Communist world movement aroused his disapproval.⁴ This, in his view, held Britain back from a more decisive foreign policy. While Rothwell was quite severe on Foreign Office officials for failing to note and fully consider Soviet motivations behind Soviet foreign policy, and for misjudging American willingness to resist Soviet expansion, he did not explain the basis of this thinking by officials. Ideology or Foreign Office awareness of Soviet domestic affairs were not discussed; neither were the important roles of political warfare and propaganda.

² Lord Strang, *The Foreign Office* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1955); J. Connell, *The Office* (Allan Wingate, London, 1958); D. Bishop, *The Administration of British Foreign Relations* (Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1961); D. Busk, *The Craft of Diplomacy* (Pall Mall Press, London, 1967); E. Plischke (ed.), *Modern Diplomacy: The Art and the Artisans* (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, 1979); Z. Steiner, *The Times Survey of Foreign Ministries of the World* (Times Books, London, 1982); R. Bullen (ed.), *The Foreign Office 1782-1982* (University Publications of America, Frederick, Md, 1984).

³ V. Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War, 1941-1947* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1982).

⁴ Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 161, 205, 364.

Overall, few of these officials were present in the pages and their important contributions to British foreign policy seemed to go unnoticed.

Documents released in the past fifteen years have added much to the discussion and have thus contributed to a more nuanced picture of the background of British foreign policy decisions. By the 1990s a new generation of British historians studying British foreign relations emerged. Taking advantage of a less restricted access to archives and new trends in the historiography about Britain during the Cold War, they kick-started a new debate through close study of newly declassified material. John Zametica, Anne Deighton, John Saville, Sean Greenwood, Gaynor Johnson and Ritchie Ovendale were among those who followed in Rothwell's footsteps and contributed hugely to the present understanding of the Foreign Office.⁵ Zametica and Johnson with their edited collections have offered much to the debate by focusing on individuals and specific departments. Zametica and Greenwood writing about Frank Roberts, Rothwell about Robin Hankey and Peter Boyle and Ritchie Ovendale about Oliver Franks and William Strang respectively, have finally brought these important Foreign Office staff to the forefront of the debate.⁶

Deighton, Greenwood and Saville have, like Rothwell, taken a broad view of British foreign policy and the role of the Foreign Office and chose, in line with the ongoing reassessment of the British role during the post-war years, the Cold War and the post-war Labour government as the external parameters of their discussion. Deighton's *Britain and the First Cold War*, published in 1990, provided a collection of essays by specialists in the field. Within the new post-revisionist context this book declared an end to the bipolarity of much of the Cold War historiography and reclaimed an important role for Britain in this conflict.⁷ But with a leading role came questions about Britain's responsibility for the cooling of relations with the Kremlin and thus the role of the Foreign Office came under new scrutiny. Not surprisingly, views on officials vary. Raymond Smith sees them as

⁵ J. Zametica (ed.), *British Officials and British Foreign Policy 1945-1950* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1990); A. Deighton (ed.), *Britain and the First Cold War* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1990); J. Saville, *The Politics of Continuity: British Foreign Policy and the Labour Government 1945-46* (Verso, London, 1993); S. Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War 1945-1991* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000); G. Johnson (ed.), *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, London, 2005).

⁶ Zametica, Rothwell, Boyle and Ovendale in Zametica, *British Officials*; Greenwood, 'Frank Roberts and the 'other' Long Telegram: The view from the British Embassy in Moscow, March 1946' *JCH* 25 (1990), pp. 103-122.

⁷ Deighton, *Britain and the First Cold War*.

‘hawks’ who ‘offered the most unqualified and unremittingly hostile view of the Soviet Union.’ Deighton herself, discussing British policy towards Germany, noted more positively that officials were important in the development and adoption of new policy ideas.⁸ Sean Greenwood in *Britain and the Cold War*, published ten years later, appears to agree with Smith noting that the Foreign Office was ‘russophobe’ and that one of its important committees, the Russia Committee, was ‘packed with born-again hardliners.’⁹ John Saville, continuing that revisionist line, is even more critical of the Foreign Office.¹⁰ According to him, from the top, Ernest Bevin, to the bottom, the officials in the departments, the British failed to see the signs and were too inflexible.¹¹ The assumption of aggressive tendencies by the Soviet Union, he stated, was endemic. The ‘collective mind’ of the Foreign Office, in his argument, was prejudiced in favour of preserving the Empire and Britain’s world role.¹² What is missing from some of these accounts is an analysis of the information officials based their advice on. While there may well have been personal opinions opposed to cooperation with the Kremlin, it does not do these men justice to argue that their advice would have gone against information available at the time.

Research by other historians on new departments and committees set up to deal with the changed international scene added much to this more detailed picture of the Foreign Office. Here the Information Research Department (IRD) in particular has received a lot of attention from historians.¹³ Its importance lay with its central position in the execution of British foreign policy at a time when psychological warfare and extensive propaganda campaigns were at the heart of it. To look closer at departments, committees and individuals is important as it illuminates the hopes and fears of policy makers at the time. The shift towards first covert and then overt propaganda campaigns, for example,

⁸ Smith and Deighton in Deighton, *Britain and the First Cold War*, p.40, 49, and 53ff.

⁹ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 33, 42.

¹⁰ Saville, *The Politics of Continuity*.

¹¹ Saville, *The Politics of Continuity*, pp. 6ff, 66, 93.

¹² Saville, *The Politics of Continuity*, p. 6, 20, 51, 54.

¹³ L. Smith, ‘Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department: 1947-1977’ *JIS* 9 (1) (1980), pp. 67-83; R. Merrick, ‘The Russia Committee of the British Foreign Office and the Cold War, 1946-1947’ *JCH* 20 (1985), pp. 453-468; R. Aldrich, ‘Putting Culture into the Cold War: The Cultural Relations Department (CRD) and British Covert Information Warfare’ *INS* 18 (2) (2003), pp. 109-133 and *The Hidden Hand: America, Britain and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (John Murray, London, 2002), pp. 443-464; T. Shaw, ‘The IRD of the British Foreign Office and the Korean War, 1950-53’ *JCH* 34 (2) (1999), pp. 263-281; J. Vaughan, ‘Cloak without Dagger: How the IRD fought Britain’s Cold War in the Middle East, 1948-56’ *CWH* 4 (3) (2004), pp. 56-84; W.S. Lucas & C.J. Morris, ‘A Very British Crusade: The Information Research Department and the Beginning of the Cold War’ in R. Aldrich (ed.), *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-51* (Routledge, London, 1992), pp. 85-110; Foreign Office, *History Notes: IRD, Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department 1946-1948* Nr.9 (Foreign Office, August 1995).

illustrates the fact that this conflict was deemed serious and potentially long-lasting enough to warrant such an investment. This focus on propaganda and political warfare incidentally added much to the debate about the cultural and social aspects of the Cold War. The cultural turn of the 1990s, although concentrating on other avenues of historical enquiry, has not bypassed political history completely. New information and arguments provide much needed insight into the use of soft versus hard power in the implementation of foreign policy during the Cold War.

The release of more documents has also encouraged the growth of more research into the still relatively unexplored world of intelligence and counter-intelligence. Even though this might appear to be of limited impact on the study of foreign relations, the new information has been invaluable. Richard Aldrich's *The Hidden Hand* set a very high benchmark for those who follow. Apart from the sheer breadth of his research, the attention paid to the structural set up of the Foreign Office, Whitehall and various other government departments provided a lot of detail on their internal organisation. The understanding of the more obscure details of the Cold War, he argued, is essential to the understanding of this conflict.¹⁴ The supervision of parts of the intelligence service during the war as well as the running of the Political Warfare Executive gave the Foreign Office status, experience and know-how that was quite unmatched. Aldrich's discussion of the IRD, for example, was invaluable in understanding the procedural problems of carrying out the long desired propaganda campaign against the Soviet Union that started in early 1948.¹⁵ Other studies which concentrated on very specific organisational structures in the Foreign Office have also greatly contributed to the better understanding of its early Cold War organisational change.¹⁶ They support the notion that Britain's harder line with regards to the Soviet Union really started with the formation of the IRD.¹⁷

Due to the nature of the released documents, present interests in intelligence and security questions, and in general the possibilities of the Freedom of Information initiatives, much of the newer historiography has concentrated on different avenues of investigation to

¹⁴ Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Aldrich, *Hidden Hand*, pp. 122-142.

¹⁶ Aldrich, 'Putting Culture into the Cold War'; Shaw, 'The Information Research Department'; Merrick, 'The Russia Committee'; Smith, 'Covert British Propaganda'; G. Bennett, *Churchill's Man of Mystery: Desmond Morton and the World of Intelligence* (Routledge, London, 2007).

¹⁷ R. Smith, 'A Climate of Opinion: British Officials and the Development of British Soviet Policy, 1945-47' *IA 64* (4) (1988), pp. 631-647.

explain and illuminate British foreign policy during the early Cold War. This reflects changes in the historical profession and the issues debated which now increasingly use the newer disciplines of intelligence, social, gender or cultural studies. Interdisciplinary efforts, in addition, have opened up further paths of research while also providing new vocabulary. Political science, sociology and economics, in particular, have greatly enhanced the debate and stimulated new discussion. The new cultural and social histories are filling gaps left by decades of focusing on political histories. However, as Margaret Macmillan has recently pointed out, the understanding of political history is of vital importance if one is to understand any modern society.¹⁸ As much as political history seems old fashioned now, there are still many interesting and important stories to be told, and this new and differently focused historiography can help in telling them. The present focus in much of historical writing on individuals and their role in history, and the popularity of these histories, could help to draw attention to those in the British political establishment who have so far received little attention from historians.¹⁹

The emerging discussion about the structures and organisation within the Foreign Office is proving important to the discussion of the overall impact of officials' suggestions.²⁰ This, after all, is an important point: how much influence did officials have and how did they use that influence. Adam Adamthwaite was dismissive of Foreign Office efforts to make it more efficient in its handling of information and its discussion, and argued that in the end 'the Foreign Office failed to meet the challenge.'²¹ Focusing mainly on structural issues, he did not, however, take into account the other changes instituted by the Foreign Office and its departments. Zara Steiner, much along the same vein, has written that the 'Foreign Office presents an image of a traditional organisation that has failed to move with the times.'²² However, the Northern Department, for example, did change its method of reporting several times to keep up with changing circumstances and continuously adapted to better meet its brief of providing accurate, up to date and well analysed policy advice. Alan Bullock had noted earlier that the Foreign Office was crucial for the work of the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister.²³

¹⁸ M. Macmillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History* (Profile Books Ltd, London, 2009).

¹⁹ Sean Greenwood made a first step by offering an in-depth study of Gladwyn Jebb, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World* (Martinus Nijhoff, Leiden, 2009).

²⁰ For example, Merrick, 'The Russia Committee'.

²¹ A. Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World, 1945-49: The view from the Foreign Office' *IA* 61 (2) (1985), p. 232.

²² Z. Steiner, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Resistance and Adaptation to Changing Times' *CBH* 18 (3) (2004), p. 28.

²³ A. Bullock, *Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary 1945-1951* (Heinemann, London, 1983), pp. 65ff.

A few years ago Gaynor Johnson has noted that there still was no extensive study of the Foreign Office after 1945.²⁴ The disparity in the discussion of British foreign relations in the historiography between large numbers of books focusing on Cabinet level debates and far fewer books analysing the discussions in the relevant government departments before recommendations were made to the Foreign Secretary and the Cabinet means that there is a substantial part in the policy debate that has so far been neglected. What is needed are more departmental studies and more work on the personal profiles of those who were intimately linked to the information analysis and policy formation process at a lower level in the hope that these studies will contribute to a much better overall understanding of the role of the Foreign Office during these years.

The Northern Department

The Northern Department of the British Foreign Office was one of about forty departments. The number varied occasionally as new departments were established or some were closed. In 1945 there were thirty four. By 1948 there were fifty seven, including the ten departments now dealing with German affairs. The central focus of this thesis is the Northern Department which after 1945 consisted of several desks dealing with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and Poland. Each desk in the department looked after one of these countries. The Soviet desk dealt with all incoming letters and telegrams regarding the Soviet Union as well as additional information that came from the Economic Information Department (EID), the Foreign Office Research Department (FORD) or the Intelligence Services. The annual *Foreign Office List* names on average only three staff directly responsible for the Soviet desk. Staff thus dealt with a significant amount of information. Continuity of personnel here was important and generally it seems that when staff were moved to other departments or to embassies abroad at least one specialist remained in the department.

Staffed by older and experienced senior officials, and energetic and argumentative junior ones, the Northern Department provides an interesting case study of the Foreign Office, its organisation and policy advice, and the differing thinking within it about Britain's role in the world, the plans for the retention of that role and the methods available to diplomats at the time. While the younger staff may well have been an occasional nuisance to their older

²⁴ G. Johnson, 'Introduction: The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century' in *CBH* 18 (2004), p. 4.

superiors, they also provided the impetus for much discussion and were not afraid to voice critical and unpopular opinions. The real experts, Martin Folly has noted, were the junior staff, while the more senior officials were the 'all-rounders.'²⁵ This was an important issue: while the experienced officials, like Hankey, Jebb, Sargent, Dixon or Warner, were aware of the difficulties of formulating, presenting and implementing new policies, the younger staff, like Roberts, Brimelow, Galsworthy, Harrison, and Hohler were arguably much more willing to look at all the available information, think outside the box and present memoranda that raised controversial points and aimed to help the understanding of particular issues: the discussion of ideology, for example, really took off in the later 1940s. Few of these men have been the subject of critical study resulting in a lack of understanding of how and why specific policy recommendations were made.

Younger staff had not spent their careers in a Foreign Office that could argue and negotiate from strength but had entered it at a time when Britain's position in the world had already begun to slip. Their perspective was thus different and their proposed solutions arguably more radical and realistic. Steiner has graciously noted that 'no department is better than the men who staff it.'²⁶ Continuity and change helped to retain important knowledge of Soviet affairs and know-how of the policy formation process amongst officials while equally allowing new staff to make their mark and infuse the process with new ideas and energy. Permanent Under-Secretaries, like other senior officials, were, as Johnson has rightly pointed out, incredibly important for a sense of continuity within the Office; people who knew how the system worked and how it ought to be organised. Arguing along the same lines, Steiner noted that Foreign Office ministers, acted like a 'departmental memory bank.'²⁷

1945, in more ways than one, proved a watershed for the Foreign Office and the Northern Department. Long planned reforms were implemented, entry into the Foreign Office was opened up to applicants from a broader social base, and its structure at home and abroad was streamlined. The new Labour government supported the setting up of new committees, such as the Russia Committee, and created more departments within the Foreign Office to deal with the complex post-war situation in Europe (setting up, for example, the Eastern

²⁵ M. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union, 1940-1945* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000), p. 5.

²⁶ Z. Steiner, et al (eds.), *The Times Survey of the Foreign Ministries of the World* (Times Books, London, 1982), p. 28.

²⁷ Steiner, *The Times Survey*, p. 13.

European Information Department) and with the demands of the administration of the occupied Germany. But even after extensive reforms the organisation of the Foreign Office left, according to some historians, something to be desired. Bishop pointed out that the lack of clear channels of authority and an inadequate machinery dealing with information and intelligence particularly hampered effectiveness.²⁸ Lord Strang, on the other hand, appeared quite pleased with the results when he wrote that 'certainly it needed both the world wars to bring British Foreign Service functions to their present pitch of complexity.'²⁹ Gaynor Johnson has, I think rightly, pointed out that although the Foreign Office hierarchy was fairly rigid, it was also flexible enough to allow an effective discussion and flow of information.³⁰

Although the speed, force and extent of the emerging Cold War did come as a surprise to the Foreign Office, it was not wholly unprepared. Some of its wartime structures had been left in place, like the JIC, to analyse and coordinate information, while others, like the Political Warfare Executive, were soon resurrected under a new name (the Information Research Department, hereafter IRD).³¹ The Chiefs of Staff (COS) remained closely interested in foreign affairs and the Foreign Office continued its lectures at Camberley. Many staff had spent the war years in the Foreign Office and were thus familiar with the difficult situation. Although the transfer from the wartime to the peacetime pursuit of foreign relations took time (the Prime Minister became less involved as the Foreign Secretary took over in a more active and decisive role), officials soon returned to taking the initiative with important memoranda to discuss pressing issues. While Attlee took a back seat and let Bevin get on with his job, staff at the Foreign Office thrived in a new, though admittedly externally caused, busy environment.

In addition to these challenges the Foreign Office also had to contend with outside influences which it could not control. The emerging Cold War, the nationalist liberation movements fighting the European colonial powers in the Far East, a catastrophic financial situation in Britain and the general repercussions of six years of war greatly enhanced the influence of the Chiefs of Staff and the Treasury. The Foreign Office nevertheless tried to

²⁸ Bishop, *The Administration*, p. 226; also Bullen, *The Foreign Office*.

²⁹ Lord Strang, *The Foreign Office*, p. 39.

³⁰ Johnson, 'Introduction: The Foreign Office', p. 2.

³¹ Adamthwaite bemoans the absence of a proper planning machinery to deal with the complicated international situation, 'Britain and the World, 1945-49', p. 232.

wrestle as much power back as it could; arguing that it alone had the expertise to properly assess Britain's international situation and options. Although the Foreign Office continued to work closely with and was influenced by these and other government departments, lack of space here prohibits a fuller discussion of these links. Only occasionally, when a Treasury or Chiefs of Staff paper was mentioned prominently or when particular problems arose with regard to these departments, will these specific connections be discussed.

The Foreign Office essentially had to demonstrate that it alone was equipped and able to assess the available information correctly and to come up with realistic and implementable foreign policies that would safeguard British interests without alienating either the State Department or the Kremlin (too much) in the process. Bishop had noted that 'with the advent of dictators, the diplomat had almost ceased to count', and one could argue that this affected officials at the Foreign Office as well.³² As much as the change of government in July 1945 and then again in October 1951 was important, it did not change the international scene and both governments found that their scope of policies was rather limited. So possibly more than before, the government was dependent on accurate and realistic advice from the Foreign Office.

A new assessment of Northern Department perceptions of the Soviet Union

This thesis seeks to demonstrate, through the concentration on one department, how the information analysis and policy formation process vis-à-vis the Soviet Union within the Foreign Office worked. By focusing on the Northern Department, which has not been given a lot of attention from historians so far, between 1945 and 1953, it is possible to show where this information was coming from and what the advice was based on in detail. Thorough analysis of the available sources reveals the everyday worries of a department that was at the centre of the policy debates about the Soviet Union. Many issues were discussed which are not surprising, like Soviet domestic affairs or potential Soviet international interests. Other findings, however, were more unexpected, such as the ongoing debate about the likelihood of war.

³² Bishop, *The Administration*, p. 281.

A more balanced post-revisionist argument with regards to the Foreign Office has, it seems, yet to emerge and this thesis hopes to contribute a small part to that discussion. It will illustrate, using this department, how the Foreign Office worked and why these lower ranking officials were so important for the formation of British foreign policy. Although many records are not released yet, but can be requested under the Freedom of Information Act, it is possible to show through departmental records how diligently and conscientiously staff worked to identify and promote the best possible option for British foreign policy. While this study is set in the early years of the Cold War and necessarily has to be seen within this context, it is mainly concerned with this very early stage of policy formation and thus cannot address some of the bigger questions of Cold War history which have been discussed sufficiently elsewhere.

This thesis demonstrates, in comparison to Saville's argument, that there was no official mind with regards to the best way of dealing with the Soviet Union during the difficult post-war years. There were many disagreements between officials and agreement was often only reached after detailed and prolonged debate. An official mind, moreover, in an age of waning imperial power and economic prowess, and ever changing international circumstances would have been a liability. Frank discussion and 'thinking outside the box', particularly by the 'Young Turks' in the Northern Department, proved important in enabling broad discussion and thus in preventing unrealistic policy advice. There was a real desire to understand the basis of Soviet foreign policy and its concern with security, ideology and prestige. The 'Kremlin Memorandum', for example, was an attempt to see the world through Soviet eyes. The discussion of the various choices available to the British was an asset that proved highly beneficial to Britain's understanding of the world and Britain's role in it.

The simple issue of information stands at the centre of this thesis. The main aim is to show what the British Foreign Office knew about the Soviet Union and Soviet plans, and how officials discussed and used this information. The available information was good despite obvious and large gaps. Reports and memoranda routinely included detailed information about Soviet politics, economy, ideology and foreign policy. Too often British foreign policy is discussed entirely from the perspective of those at the top, the Cabinet, the Prime

Minister or parliament.³³ Hankey himself, Rothwell noted, was worried that those at the top may not fully understand the threat and react accordingly; i.e. that those not privy to all the available information were picking and choosing what they believed or did not grasp the significance of particular developments.³⁴ It is, therefore, hugely important and rewarding to understand what the original information and policy advice from the specialists at the Foreign Office was and why a specific tactic or strategy had been suggested or criticised.

With the release of more Foreign Office files to the National Archives these issues can now be more comprehensively researched and addressed, and it becomes clear that officials' advice was far from pre-determined or single-minded. As this thesis will show, their advice was based on thorough examination of all the available information and extended discussions about memoranda and briefs which laid out specific problems or policies, and that their suggestions therefore were realistic and pragmatic. Although Britain, just like the USA and the Soviet Union, was not averse to taking advantage of a situation, Britain tried to retain policies which allowed the possibility of continued dialogue with the Kremlin. Isolation, whether chosen or imposed, was more dangerous than difficult dialogue. It could be argued that it was precisely the information available to officials that supported both cases: that for closer relations with the USA and that for a continued effort to achieve a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union, which despite all the problems and set-backs provided the best alternative to an accelerated arms race and war.

Far from being simple early Cold War thinking, documents suggest that the knowledge and discussion of Soviet policies and motives in the Northern Department was extensive and careful. Many avenues were researched and argued before a final consensus emerged after often weeks or months of discussion and debate. Information was not used to distort arguments to support a specific case but rather tended to illustrate both sides of an argument before advising a particular policy. Possibly more realistic than the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister, officials tried to avoid policies seen as too severe towards the Soviet Union but advocated those which could be supported and which would preferably not lead to an intensifying Cold War. Officials were not Cold Warriors but realised that British policy towards the Soviet Union had to be balanced in order to avoid

³³ R. Smith, 'Introduction' in Zametica, *British Officials*, p. 5.

³⁴ V. Rothwell, 'Robin Hankey' in Zametica, *British Officials*, pp. 170ff.

endangering peace and an escalation in the cost of rearmament. Bound by an increasing dependence on the United States and an obvious geopolitical interest in Europe, the Foreign Office had no choice but to support the side that appeared more likely to preserve peace and that was most able to defend peace if necessary, the United States and the UNO.

Research for this thesis was based exclusively on the files of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office in the FO371 General Correspondence series. The timeframe between 1945 and 1953 was chosen to analyse the early years of the Cold War until the death of Stalin when regime change in the Soviet Union led to an overhaul of the country's foreign policy. Although this may appear to be too narrow a focus, the sheer wealth of available information made an in-depth analysis within a larger timeframe impossible. Although many files have been recently declassified, many more are still not readily available and have to be requested separately under the Freedom of Information Act. Important documents which have not been previously discussed elsewhere have been used in this study to show that British foreign policy advice at the time was based on experience, thorough analysis of all the available information and a measured dose of pragmatic realism. This allowed the British government to pursue a foreign policy that was based as much in concrete evidence as on a well developed understanding of the shifting political and economic power realities after World War II.

This thesis is divided into three similarly organised parts, each of which covers a period of roughly three years: the first part discusses the period between July 1945 and December 1947, the second part investigates January 1948 until March 1951, and the third part deals with the period between March 1951 and the summer of 1953. Each part begins with a chapter discussing the Northern Department, and the challenges and changes it faced during each three year period concentrating particularly in organisational and structural issues. To set the scene with regards to the Soviet Union, both in her domestic sphere and her international ambitions, the following chapter details the most important developments within the Soviet Union and its foreign policy. The middle chapters of the first and second parts discuss particular issues which were regarded as vitally important by the Northern Department in the debate about future British foreign policy. They illustrate very specific concerns and allow a detailed study of the discussions surrounding these issues. It was the perceived Communist threat which attracted the most attention in the second part. In the third part Political Warfare, and Western European Defence and the proposed rearmament

of Germany constitute the heart of the discussion. The final and main chapter of each part deals with the Northern Department's response to these issues and perceived threats, and features the discussions and policy proposals emanating from these issues.

The first part centres around the early post-war aspirations of cooperation and those elements of Soviet opportunism which proved increasingly difficult to negotiate. Between 1945 and the end of 1947 the Northern Department faced a most challenging time: it was confronted with a very different international situation as compared to 1939 while there was no efficient way to effectively deal with the flood of telegrams and letters from the Moscow embassy which followed the end of the war. Organisational and structural changes during these three years, detailed in Chapter One, optimised the process of information analysis and discussion. A variety of new weekly, fortnightly or monthly reports were introduced to summarise the large amount of information and to make it accessible to those outside the department who were not Soviet specialists.

With regards to British foreign policy this three year period constituted what Orme Sargent aptly described as 'stocktaking'. Long periods of negotiation with the Soviet Union as well as with the USA clarified areas of British strength and weakness, and staff started to discuss those options viewed as best serving British interests. The Conferences of Foreign Ministers, ongoing until the December 1947, which cannot be detailed here as the Northern Department was not concerned with them directly, slowly clarified areas of policy division. The peace treaties, the continuing debate about the future of Eastern Europe and the central problem of Germany were discussed in detail in the Northern Department as they were central to Soviet foreign policy immediately after the war. Some of the important issues, discussed in the following two parts, only emerged later on. For this reason there is no middle chapter in this part. There was no one concern or debate that towered over other issues. Rather than look too much into the future, which was, of course, also done, the department concentrated on assessing Britain's position and the strategies and tactics available to her.

The second part follows the change from the negotiation for a post-war settlement and an expressed wish to cooperate to a much more confrontational approach and attempts of consolidation on both sides. The Communist threat, including Communist ideology, the

Cominform and the Peace Campaign, was perceived as a viable danger to British interests in Europe and the Far East. Discussion about all aspects of it was extensive and often heated, new committees were formed to discuss papers in a more formal and interdepartmental level, and Northern Department persistence finally paid off when Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin sanctioned the start of an, initially localised, counter-propaganda campaign. Consolidation of Communist control, particularly in Eastern Europe, symbolised by the coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, worried the Northern Department extensively. The dearth of information and the increasing harassment of British representatives in these countries added to a sense that a final break with the Kremlin was imminent. The information that was obtained from these countries told a broadly similar story: that of increased Sovietisation of parties, governments, bureaucracies, and industry and agriculture. While frequent Western protests calling for the implementation of the Declaration of Europe went unheeded, efforts to speed up closer cooperation with the United States and the Western European countries were stepped up.

The Berlin Blockade, the first openly military confrontation of the early Cold War, manifested the threat from the Soviet Union and did much to accelerate developments in the West. Stalin, just like Britain, was getting tired by the continuing deadlock over Germany's future and, possibly understandably, tried to test the waters a little further. While Tito's expulsion from the Cominform in 1948 did much to damage the idea of a monolithic Communist bloc wholly controlled by the Kremlin, it added relatively little to the Western propaganda 'war chest'. The threat of war had, in the estimation of the Northern Department, increased and Bevin as well as Marshall and then Acheson put all their efforts into bringing NATO into existence in April 1949. Cold War fronts, by then, had been hardened to an extent that even the brief *détente* after Stalin's death could not really penetrate.

The third and last part details the activities of the Northern Department a period that witnessed other momentous events of the early Cold War: the conflict in Korea and Stalin's death. During these years it concentrated on promoting policies which countered Soviet Cold Warfare that helped to consolidate the gains made so far; for example, Western European defence through the proposed European Defence Community and the rearmament of West Germany. The relationship with the USA, by no means equal or straightforward, was also still being built and even the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall

Plan had not fully ended speculation about the reliability of the US as Britain's main foreign political partner. Stalin's death added surprisingly little to these developments. Consolidation on both sides continued although channels of communication were opened. Local and limited settlements were achieved but the language of the Cold War that had emerged over the previous few years did not change. What the Northern Department had achieved by 1953 was impressive: a tighter and more efficient structure and organisation, closer cooperation within the Foreign Office and with outside agencies, and most importantly it had helped manoeuvre Britain into a position where it still led, though not as decisively as before 1939, the fight for progress and peace.

Britain in 1945 and British foreign policy

The large and continuously growing body of work on British foreign relations reflects the importance of foreign policy in British history. However, the discussion of British foreign policy, and thus of the Foreign Office, since 1945 has invariably been set within the parameters of imperial decline, Cold War and European integration. Although the debate is ongoing about the influence of these issues on historians personally, it seems that orthodox as well as revisionist and post-revisionist historians have felt specific desires to absolve of or attribute blame. The revisionist and post-revisionist debate, often much more precise than previous discussions, has broadened new and balanced old arguments. Better access to archives has enabled historians to look much closer at the motives and methods of decision making. International relations theorists have added to these debates by questioning the perceptions and uses of economic, political and military power in forcing or facilitating domestic and foreign policies after 1945.³⁵ While American motives have subsequently been most severely questioned, British and Soviet policies have also come under criticism. As a result, the Foreign Office has not surprisingly been seen in a more critical light.

The historiography regarding British foreign policy is now so extensive that it cannot be discussed here in detail; rather the focus will be on those issues important for this thesis. While Britain's role during the early Cold War has been slowly reclaimed by British historians during the past decade through revisionist and post-revisionist debate, the external parameters of that role have inevitably remained the same: a great imperial power in decline, massive economic and financial exhaustion after the war which limited foreign

³⁵ J. Kent & J. Young, *International Relations since 1945: A Global History* (OUP, Oxford, 2004).

political choices, tenacious attempts of the British government to situate itself in a position where it could influence, much more than its weakened state would otherwise have allowed, those policies of the US State Department which were seen as important in the maintenance and rebuilding of an independent British influence worldwide. This is important as any new discussion which now focused more closely on the impact of British policies during those years cannot ignore those parameters which, in a largely American led debate, have limited Britain's role in the conflict.

Britain's foreign policy has traditionally been seen as concerned with issues of maintaining a favourable European balance of power, the establishment of an optimal international trade environment with a particular preference for trade within its empire, and the maintenance of naval lines of communication to maintain and protect its empire and external trade routes. Alliances were sought when necessary but entanglement was avoided when risks and benefits appeared disproportionate. Two world wars changed Britain's ability to maintain these interests and to directly influence these issues through its own strength. After 1945, for example, as a response to new technologies defence priorities changed.³⁶ By May 1945 Churchill, in government for another two and a half months, saw his foreign political choices extremely limited. At the edge of a war ravaged continent, with a crumbling empire and debilitating debts the choice was simple: closer relations with the USA, despite some difficult demands, or a continued relationship with the Soviet Union which would always have been fraught with difficulties. The Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee (PUSC) argued that the 'third force' idea was unrealistic and that in the end, there was not really a choice.³⁷ Britain edged closer to Washington while keeping a foot in the door of Europe as the relationship with Moscow, established despite a lot of suspicion during the war, disappeared into thin air.

Historians generally agree that 1945 for Britain was a watershed. Although not yet bipolar, international power was shifting away from Western Europe towards the Soviet Union in the East and the USA in the West.³⁸ Developments that had started during the previous decades came to the fore while new developments which had been a result of the war or

³⁶ R. Ovendale (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments 1945-1951* (Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1984), p. 7.

³⁷ R. Ovendale, 'William Strang and the Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee' in Zametica, *British Officials*, p. 225.

³⁸ D.C. Watt, 'Britain, the United States and the Opening of the Cold War' in Ovendale, *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments*, p. 45.

had been aggravated by it merged into that process. Victory in 1945 had not achieved the sense of security that all sides had craved and an increasing lack of confidence and mutual suspicion about future intentions became the *Leitmotiv* for much of the Cold War and its diplomacy; 'a legacy of mistrust' as Geoffrey Warner noted, which created, as Norman Davies put it, 'a sense of futility'.³⁹ War, or the fear of it, became a common denominator in international diplomacy.⁴⁰ At the same time the arena of conflicts now moved eastwards. With the stalemate in Europe and the rise of China Europe slipped behind America and Eurasia in importance.⁴¹

Most of the future conflicts were located elsewhere and neither superpower, the USA and the Soviet Union, nor the dominant Great Power, Great Britain, had real plans for the post-war period that went beyond the usual concerns for territorial integrity, national security and post-war reconstruction.⁴² The UNO was still in its infancy and the continuing conflict of rival political systems proved very difficult to understand and counter. Hegemony, Peter Taylor has argued, is rare in the modern world, and, it could be argued, could not be sustained for long. In 1945 there were five possibilities and three choices for alliances, he noted: either all would cooperate or all would fall out, alternatively the US and Britain could have formed an anti-Communist front, Britain and the Soviet Union an anti-hegemonic front or the US and the Soviet Union an anti-imperialist front.⁴³ Rapidly changing international relations, however, made the choice a much more prolonged and less well defined issue.

The old balance of power in Europe, as David Reynolds has written, completely collapsed.⁴⁴ Although the reality of the situation appeared fairly clear, the overall impact of the change brought on by World War II, it is argued, only slowly filtered into the thinking

³⁹ G. Warner, 'From Ally to Enemy: Britain's Relations with the Soviet Union, 1941-1948' in M. Dockrill & B. Kercher (eds.), *Diplomacy and World Power* (CUP, Cambridge, 1996), p. 221; N. Davies *Europe: A History* (Pimlico, London, 1997), p. 1057; see also D. Reynolds, *One World Divisible: A Global History since 1945* (Allen Lane, London, 2000), p. 22; J.L. Gaddis, *The Cold War* (Allen Lane, London, 2005), p. 27; B. Smith, *Sharing Secrets with Stalin: How the Allies traded Intelligence, 1941-1945* (University Press of Kansas, Kansas, 1996), p. 249.

⁴⁰ Lord Strang, 'War and Diplomacy: 1939-1945' in D. Dilks (ed.), *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century, Vol.2: After 1939* (Macmillan, London, 1981), p. 100.

⁴¹ J.M. Roberts, *The Penguin History of Europe* (Penguin Books, London, 1996), p. 579.

⁴² Davies, *Europe*, p. 1062, 1064.

⁴³ P. Taylor, *Britain and the Cold War: 1945 as Geopolitical Transition* (Pinter Publishers, London, 1990), chapters 3 and 4.

⁴⁴ D. Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (Longman, London, 1991), p. 145.

of those in the British Foreign Office, Defence Establishment and government.⁴⁵ In the first few years after 1945, as Elizabeth Barker has noted, 'the British in their relations with the two superpowers acted both as bull-dog and bull-frog.'⁴⁶ Peter Taylor, in the same vein, wrote that there was a considerable difference between the image Britain wanted to project and the actual reality.⁴⁷ The 'cultivation of prestige', as Holland has argued, now probably derived from a sense of weakness continued to be at the centre of British foreign policy.⁴⁸ While the war further encouraged the move to towards European integration, Britain remained sceptical of closer cooperation out-with strict parameters; some have even argued that Europe was only a distraction from the Empire.⁴⁹ Leadership ambitions, initially supported by Bevin in his quest for a Third Force and in the implementation of the Marshall Plan, were in the end abandoned.⁵⁰ The ongoing uncertainty of which way to look, West to the USA or East towards Western Europe, continues to this day.

In this situation, one of reality, aspiration and deception, a profound change occurred with regard to the perception and projection of power. Britain, in particular, now was uncomfortably reminded that an independent foreign policy in the absence of sufficient economic means was essentially impossible. Military capability, a willingness to make use of ever evolving military technology and the formation of alliances which supported and demanded this thinking moved to the centre stage of international affairs. NATO became 'the bedrock of British policy' while the Soviet Union and its satellites in reply became a 'muscle-bound empire.'⁵¹ But the resulting over-extension of military and thus economic responsibilities created new problems.⁵² As economic prowess now became vital in order to maintain an impressive military deterrent and to secure a place at the top of the table of

⁴⁵ P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Unwin Hyman, London, 1989), p. 472, 474; Britain continued to play the role of a Great Power with an empire, E. Barker, *The British between the Superpowers* (Macmillan, London, 1983), p. 231; C.J. Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989), p. 71, 79; E. Shaw, *The Labour Party since 1945: Old Labour- New Labour* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1996), p. 44.

⁴⁶ Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, p. 241.

⁴⁷ P. Taylor, 'The Projection of Britain Abroad, 1945-1951' in M. Dockrill & J. Young (eds.), *British Foreign Policy 1945-1956* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989), pp. 9-30.

⁴⁸ Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness: Britain and the World Role 1900-1970* (Fontana Press, London, 1991), p. 209.

⁴⁹ A. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2001), p. 117; Davies, *Europe*, p. 1057, Davies noted that decolonisation freed European powers for a more integrated Europe, p. 1058, 1065; J. Charmley, 'Splendid Isolation to Finest Hour: Britain as a Global Power, 1900-1950' *CBH* 18 (3) (2004), p. 143; in 1950 Britain refused to join the first Western European venture, the ECSC.

⁵⁰ Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, pp. 155-162, p. 235; 'an important opportunity was missed', Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 79.

⁵¹ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 151, 174; Davies *Europe*, p. 1058.

⁵² Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, p. 64, 502; D. Saunders, *Losing an Empire, Finding a Role: British Foreign Policy since 1945* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1990), p. 43, 51.

international diplomacy, Britain's severe financial difficulties and declining industrial performance had a significant impact on her status as a great military power.⁵³ While the Foreign Secretary often demanded briefs that discussed proposed policies and the implications in a way he agreed with, officials undoubtedly used their influence to persuade him of their ideas as well as use the good relations they had with him to restore the Foreign Office as the main body of foreign policy formation.⁵⁴ The conviction all shared was that Britain was despite her problems still a Great Power.⁵⁵

With a better, though still limited, access to archives and within an international atmosphere that demanded a re-assessment of the roles of the World War II victors and their responsibilities for the ongoing Cold War the 1980s saw a rush of books setting out to re-evaluate British policies since 1945. Titles proclaiming a 'Retreat from Power', the 'Rise and Fall of the Great Powers' or a Britain 'between the Superpowers' suggested a negative assessment of British efforts to retain its role and possibly even a failure of that effort.⁵⁶ Increasing subordination to the USA, in particular, was seen as evidence of a much weakened Britain.⁵⁷ The ongoing Cold War with its frequent crises at the same time demanded in the wake of several foreign interventions by Washington a re-assessment; Rothwell here was one of the first to set British foreign policy specifically in this context. Balancing this debate, Britain's relations with the Kremlin were subjected to more scrutiny.

Elizabeth Barker has illustrated the varying conflicts which British policy makers had to take into account after the war. She argued that it was essentially an understanding of profound weakness which influenced policy making.⁵⁸ Focusing on realistic choices available at the time, Bevin was willing to settle for a Soviet sphere of influence in the East, while pursuing a close relationship with Washington. Europe, despite his initial attempts to secure a 'third force' in the 'middle of the planet' never became a priority and

⁵³ G.C. Peden, *Arms, Economics and British Strategy: From Dreadnoughts to Hydrogen Bombs* (CUP, Cambridge, 2007), p. 7.

⁵⁴ Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World', p. 224; A. Deighton, 'Towards a Western Strategy: The Making of British Policy Towards Germany, 1945-1946' in A. Deighton (ed.), *Britain and the First Cold War* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1990), pp. 53ff; Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World', p. 225.

⁵⁶ Dilks, *Retreat from Power*; Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*; Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*.

⁵⁷ Lord Strang, 'War and Diplomacy', pp. 71ff.

⁵⁸ Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, preface.

lagged far behind other efforts to secure beneficial relations particularly with the USA but initially also with the Soviet Union. There was still, Barker argued, a certain 'sense of superiority and arrogance towards Western Europe.'⁵⁹ British efforts to secure closer relations with Western Europe, she noted, were symbolic only; it was rather late in the day that the British saw the economic benefits of Western Europe.⁶⁰ John Charmley contended that 'even though Europe was important enough for Britain to die for, it was not important enough for Britain to reconstruct.'⁶¹ Bevin, John Gormly has written, was more interested in obtaining his sphere of influence between the American and the Soviet spheres than concentrating on Europe.⁶² But he was worried about Britain's prospects noting that 'if we are not careful, our victory in war may lead to us being plucked by our allies.'⁶³

While it had previously been a British prerogative to base policies on a well defined globalist thinking due to concerns with her empire, after 1945 both the USA and the USSR quickly saw the opportunities and benefits of policy planning based on broader concepts and with broader aims. The post-war Pax Americana which emerged as a result necessarily led to concurrent re-adjustments of British aims and methods, and the emerging 'politics of decline' were, according to Paul Kennedy, difficult for the British who were used to a fully independent foreign policy.⁶⁴ Britain's status and power rapidly declined after 1945 and has not recovered since. The rules of international diplomacy had changed by 1945 leading Saunders to note that 'if one party plays power politics in an anarchical system then those with threatened interests' have to do so too.⁶⁵ An alliance to one of the two sides of the conflict thus appeared imperative for national security. British determination to remain a great power as close as possible to the dominant superpower, the USA, cost her dearly. Military expenditure rose well beyond indefinitely sustainable levels and the efforts to possess her own atomic bomb arguably did not result in better cards at the negotiating table with neither the USA nor the USSR.⁶⁶ Despite these issues, there is the argument that the Cold War was a blessing in disguise for the British.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ This, Bartlett has argued, was a missed opportunity for the British to build a leading role in Europe, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 79.

⁶⁰ Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, pp. 155-162, 235, 237-8; J. Kent 'Bevin's Imperialism and the Idea of Euro-Africa 1945-1949' in Dockrill & Young, *British Foreign Policy, 1945-1956*, pp. 47-77.

⁶¹ Charmley, 'Splendid Isolation to Finest Hour', p. 143.

⁶² J. Gormly, *The Collapse of the Grand Alliance 1945-1948* (Baton Rouge, London, 1987), p. 18.

⁶³ Gormly, *The Collapse*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, p. 477.

⁶⁵ Saunders, *Losing an Empire*, p. 45.

⁶⁶ See M. Gowing 'Britain, America and the Bomb' in Dockrill & Young, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 31; Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 73ff; J. Callaghan, *The Labour Party and Foreign Policy: A History*

Issues of national security in an age that saw the rise of the 'national security state' cannot be under-estimated in this discussion.⁶⁸ To see the Cold War against global changes in power, as revisionists and post-revisionists do, clarifies the importance of the conflict between issues of security and national conflicts. Even though the Cold War is over and the atomic holocaust never materialised, the fears at the time were real and have to be taken into account when assessing the motives and methods of British as well as American and Soviet policy makers. Although Saunders made a strong argument for the role of realism in British policy vis-à-vis the USSR after 1945, there was also a strong ideological undercurrent promoting liberal values across the world.⁶⁹ By 1947 against a scenario of accelerated Soviet consolidation of their orbit, still undecided American support for Britain and Europe, nationalist uprisings across the British Empire and impending economic crisis the mood was one 'of panic akin to that of March 1939.'⁷⁰ Although Reynolds may well be exaggerating here, indications from the sources do suggest that the feeling of nearing a new abyss were quite pronounced. Britain was always very sensitive of its interest and while it was willing to acquiesce to a Soviet sphere in Eastern and South Eastern Europe, it was not prepared to allow any interference in its own sphere.⁷¹

What was needed, and what some historians have focused on, was finding and proving a political masterplan; Kennedy argued that the US administration certainly believed that the Kremlin had one.⁷² No side really knew what the other was up to and within this absence of hard information suspicions and guess work necessarily emerged. It can be argued that it took Britain rather long to agree and start to implement well defined and interlinking policy initiatives. Debate was, despite Saville's assertions to the contrary, extensive and thus prolonged.⁷³ In a full-blown revisionist account, he was exceptionally critical of the Foreign Office, its workings and expertise. According to him its knowledge was 'pitiful' when compared to that of the State Department.⁷⁴ Officials' opinion was stated to be a result of pre-conceived notions rather than the result of discussion. Since there was no in-

(Routledge, London, 2007), p. 166; F.S. Northedge, *Britain and Soviet Communism* (Macmillan, London, 1982), p. 106; Deighton 'Towards a Western Strategy', p. 55.

⁶⁷ Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness*, p. 208; Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 90.

⁶⁸ M. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1992).

⁶⁹ Saunders, *Losing an Empire*, pp. 12ff.

⁷⁰ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 168; Shaw, *The Labour Party since 1945*, p. 44.

⁷¹ G. Warner, 'From Ally to Enemy: Britain's Relations with the Soviet Union, 1941-1949' in M. Dockrill & B. McKercher, *Diplomacy and World Power: Studies in British Foreign Policy, 1890-1950* (CUP, Cambridge, 1996), p. 243.

⁷² Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 501.

⁷³ Saville, *The Politics of Continuity*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Saville, *The Politics of Continuity*, p. 73.

depth analysis of the available information in the Northern Department or the State Department and its Policy Planning Staff, it seems that this criticism was largely unfounded.

The last ten years or so have seen new attempts to explain British foreign policy during the second half of the Twentieth Century and the access to more sources than ever before only benefited that effort. Britain's newly claimed role in the Cold War has come under scrutiny as the bipolar nature of the conflict was reconfirmed.⁷⁵ 'Superpowers', Reynolds has argued succinctly, were countries that had 'great powers plus great mobility of power.'⁷⁶ After 1945, according to this definition, there were only two: the USA and the USSR. This left Britain with little choice but to ally herself to one of the two. Britain, however, tried to go a middle way. The focus of British foreign policy, Greenwood noted, was not the East-West conflict but international cooperation in various bodies.⁷⁷ Germany, not the Soviet Union, was the focus of the years after 1945 and provided much common ground with the Kremlin.⁷⁸ Once cooperation here had given way to confrontation the main focus of the conflict shifted back to Washington.

While foreign policy was limited in its scope by restrictions imposed by British relations with both the USA and the Soviet Union, propaganda provided a backdoor to a more active pursuit of foreign relations.⁷⁹ Perceptions were vitally important during the Cold War and could, with much effort and guile, be manipulated. But even here the FO was under the continued pressure from the COS to be more pro-active, with a realisation that traditional diplomacy may have reached its limits and with the threat posed by the Berlin Blockade in 1948/49, that the Foreign Office's Russia Committee agreed to support the COS's stance.⁸⁰ To argue that the Russia Committee consisted largely of 'born-again hardliners' who 'wanted an all-out offensive' was, I think, too severe and did not take enough account of the information available which gradually supported a harder stance against the Soviet Union in the absence of an equally effective policy.⁸¹ Also, the argument that the Foreign Office was essentially 'russophobe' and anti-Soviet even before the Soviet Union had

⁷⁵ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Reynolds, *One World Divisible*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 6.

⁷⁸ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 20.

⁷⁹ Lucas & Morris, 'A very British Crusade', pp. 86ff; Taylor, 'The projection of Britain abroad'.

⁸⁰ Lucas & Morris, 'A very British Crusade', p. 101.

⁸¹ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 33.

ended cooperation may not take the available information and the massive change in international diplomacy after 1945 enough into account.⁸²

That it was the Labour Party that presided over a policy of gradual withdrawal from the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union and then proceeded to initiate an actual propaganda and diplomatic offensive against it was difficult for those in the Labour Party who still craved a, rather unspecified, 'socialist foreign policy.'⁸³ While there was a definite continuation of the previous governments foreign policy, there were understandably also some departures, in particular over imperial policy; although there is the assertion that the 'old imperial consciousness held sway' over the British political establishment after 1945.⁸⁴ The fact remains that the Empire fell apart under a Labour government. Some have argued that Labour never had a distinctive foreign policy and struggled with the demands of reality, although pressure from all sides may have left it little room for an imaginative or even radical foreign policy.⁸⁵ Others recognised that Labour went in new directions. Stephen Howe noted that 'Bevin broke with Lord Palmerston's dictum that Britain has no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests.' Thorpe stated, along the same lines, that the Labour government had a leading role in the formation of the new system of alliances which characterised the Cold War but had lost its reforming momentum by 1949.⁸⁶ Labour ministers were even seen as 'enthusiastic Cold Warriors.'⁸⁷ Others, like Robert Pearce, have argued that Labour made the best of a difficult situation.⁸⁸

Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union

Any discussion of Britain's relations with the United States, and the Soviet Union, necessarily has to start during the war.⁸⁹ The alliance between governments with opposing

⁸² Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 42; P. Weiler, 'Britain and the First Cold War: Revisionist Beginnings' *TCBH Vol. 9* (1) (1998), p. 137; Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World', p. 228.

⁸³ H. Pelling & A. Reid, *A Short History of the Labour Party* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991), p. 92; R. Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World: Volume One: The Evolution of Labour Foreign Policy 1900-1951* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2003), p. 161; D.G. Lilleker, *Against the Cold War: The History and political Traditions of Pro-Sovietism in the British Labour Party 1945-89* (I.B.Tauris, London, 2004), p. 109.

⁸⁴ Callaghan, *The Labour Party*, p. 162.

⁸⁵ S. Howe, 'Labour and International Affairs' in D. Tanner, et al (eds.), *Labour's First Century* (CUP, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 119-22.

⁸⁶ Howe, 'Labour and International Affairs', p. 132; Thorpe, *A History of the Labour Party*, p. 104, 119.

⁸⁷ Howe, 'Labour and International Affairs', p. 130.

⁸⁸ R. Pearce, 'Ernest Bevin' in K. Jefferys (ed.), *Labour Forces: From Ernest Bevin to Gordon Brown* (I.B. Tauris, London, 2002), pp. 7-24ff.

⁸⁹ M. Kitchen, *British policy towards the Soviet Union during the Second World War* (Macmillan, London, 1986); Gormly, *The Collapse of the Grand Alliance*; Smith, *Sharing Secrets*; J. Fenby, *Alliance: The Inside*

views of domestic and international politics has long interested historians: ‘a most improbable event’, Bradley Smith noted, an ‘unnatural alliance’ Frederick Samuel Northedge concluded, an accident that was ‘enforced and uneasy’ Geoffrey Warner has argued.⁹⁰ When the alliance fell apart a culprit was sought; a quest re-ignited by the revisionism of the 1970s and 1980s. That there was no such thing as a frank exchange of information even during the war has been convincingly shown by Smith.⁹¹ Even during the war, as allies, equality was sought but certainly not provided; for example, a unified joint command including all the allies was never established. Sometimes it even appeared as if both sides were fighting a different war.⁹²

The serious disagreements between the wartime allies over the treatment of Germany and, particularly the future of Poland and Eastern Europe, have been examined many times.⁹³ That the USA realised early on that its influence in post-war Eastern Europe might be rather slight and Churchill’s quick negotiation with Stalin over spheres of influence indicated that despite rhetoric and grand declarations realism was the basis of Western thinking with regards to Stalin’s likely sphere of influence after 1945.⁹⁴ Churchill saw himself as the most experienced of the wartime leaders, noting once: ‘with the great Russian bear on one side of me, with paws outstretched, and on the other side...the great American buffalo, and between the two sat the poor little English donkey who was the only one...who knew the right way home.’⁹⁵ He was convinced that the Empire and a special relationship with the USA would guarantee Britain’s continued Great Power role.⁹⁶ Wishful thinking did creep into the thinking of all wartime leaders as neither had a detailed plan, nor often the physical or psychological strength to fight a war of attrition after 1945. Cooperation was a much more likable and potentially profitable option. Stalin’s intentions, it seems, were to work within the alliance already present.⁹⁷ One argument is that the

Story of How Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill Won one war and Began Another (Simon and Schuster, London, 2006); D. Reynolds, *Summits: Six Meetings that Shaped the Twentieth Century* (Allen Lane, London, 2007); L. Rees, *Behind Closed Doors: Stalin, the Nazis and the West* (BBC Books, London, 2008).

⁹⁰ Smith, *Sharing Secrets*; Northedge, *Britain and Soviet Communism*, p. 100; Warner, ‘From Ally to Enemy’, p. 221 and 242.

⁹¹ Smith, *Sharing Secrets with Stalin*, p. 253.

⁹² Smith, *Sharing Secrets with Stalin*, p. 90.

⁹³ For example, Reynolds, *Summits*; Rees, *Behind Closed Doors*.

⁹⁴ R. Service, *Comrades: Communism: A World History* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007), p. 232.

⁹⁵ Fenby, *Alliance*, p. 4; on Churchill’s unrealistic expectations see also K. Larres, *Churchill’s Cold War: The Politics of personal Diplomacy* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002), introduction.

⁹⁶ Larres, *Churchill’s Cold War*, p. 90.

⁹⁷ D. Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (OUP, Oxford, 2006), p. 270.

interest in spheres of influence was exactly what Stalin thought would be workable: if each power had its own sphere there would be less conflict.⁹⁸

Relations with the USA during the early post-war years were difficult. The wartime military and intelligence alliance did not translate easily into a political and economic peacetime alliance and the British desire to institutionalise the alliance with the USA proved difficult.⁹⁹ The 'special relationship', much debated since then, was essentially a tool, as Reynolds has argued.¹⁰⁰ Attlee, not surprisingly, complained that 'there is a tendency in America to regard us as an outpost of America.'¹⁰¹ Britain had to prove its worth and the price Britain paid for American support was to help with the 'defence of the free world.'¹⁰² Even though Britain and America had been and still were economic rivals, there was no alternative to this alliance; Churchill, for example, never doubted the correctness of this choice.¹⁰³ 'Too great an independence of the USA would be a dangerous luxury', Adamthwaite quoted in his article along the same lines.¹⁰⁴ Britain needed the cooperation of the American government in the Middle East, Germany and over the Atomic Bomb, in its fight against the expansion of Communism, for the retention of its world role, and, most importantly, it needed American loans.¹⁰⁵ Others, however, continue to argue that Britain's independence from the United States was what would guarantee a Great Power role for Britain.¹⁰⁶ The USA was certainly equally aware that it could not pursue a foreign policy completely independently of Britain. Not to be seen by others to treat Britain in a preferential way, the Anglo-American relationship was portrayed as part

⁹⁸ G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics: Coexistence, Revolution and Cold War, 1945-1991* (Routledge, London, 1999), p. 20.

⁹⁹ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ D. Reynolds, 'A special relationship'? America, Britain and the International Order since World War II' *IA* 62 (1) (1985-86), p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Vickers, *The Labour Party and the World*, p. 177.

¹⁰² Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, p. 131; Saunders, *Losing an Empire*, pp. 44-45, 71; Korea in particular proved a burden, Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness*, p. 233; Shaw, *The Labour Party*, p. 41, 44-5.

¹⁰³ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 151; P.Lowe, 'The Significance of the Korean War in Anglo-American Relations, 1950-1953' in Dockrill & Young, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 126-148; Larres, *Churchill's Cold War*, p. 82ff.

¹⁰⁴ Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World', p. 227.

¹⁰⁵ Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, p. 53; Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 70ff; R. Ovendale (ed.), *British Defence Policy since 1945* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1994), p. 42; M. Stephens, *Ernest Bevin* (TGWU Publications, Bungay Suffolk, 1981), p. 111; E. Goldstein, 'The British Official Mind and the United States, 1919-1942' in T. Otte & C.A. Pagedas (eds.), *Personalities, War and Diplomacy: Essays in International History* (Frank Cass, London, 1997), p. 68; Shaw, *The Labour Party*, p. 44; Pelling & Reid, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, p. 91ff; Howe, 'Labour and International Affairs', p. 133.

¹⁰⁶ Callaghan, *The Labour Party*, p. 171.

of a broader Western alliance not a close bilateral relationship.¹⁰⁷ Real independence from the USA and the pursuit of a fully independent foreign policy nevertheless proved unrealistic. Britain certainly understood the mechanism of dependence and the implications of economic diplomacy for foreign affairs.

Britain's problematic relationship with the United States is important in explaining British post-war foreign policy choices. The perhaps inevitable rise of American power had direct influences within the British foreign policy establishment. As Erik Goldstein has pointed out, American policy discussions, plans and methods could not be ignored.¹⁰⁸ Although sharing a common set of ideas, liberal capitalism, democracy etc, the continued hesitation to take on more responsibility until 1947 when isolationist ideas still loomed large and British adherence to the concept of imperial power proved difficult to reconcile. British and American aims were similar but not identical.¹⁰⁹ American commitments after 1945 it is argued were reactive rather than a conscious attempt to take the lead in world affairs although it was obvious that the status of the USA had increased immeasurably.¹¹⁰ American preponderant power was, according to Greenwood, initially used 'by proxy' through its relations with other countries.¹¹¹

Once, however, Truman took note of the fact that the international situation really had moved in his favour, he, believing in the greatness of the American system, went to build up American influence.¹¹² The United States thus found itself in a position where it had to take responsibility, even if initially only economically, if some form of international stability was to be re-established.¹¹³ The USA like the Soviet Union strove to consolidate its half of the planet.¹¹⁴ The Marshall Plan therefore, cornerstone of many interpretations of the early Cold War, remains of interest to historians today.¹¹⁵ Some see it as an inspired

¹⁰⁷ A. Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, London, 1995), pp. 97ff.

¹⁰⁸ Goldstein, 'The British Official Mind', p. 68.

¹⁰⁹ Saunders, *Losing an Empire*, p. 52; Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 59; Reynolds, 'A Special Relationship?', p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 464; Reynolds, *One World Divisible*, p. 21.

¹¹¹ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 40.

¹¹² Service, *Comrades*, p. 245.

¹¹³ For example, Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, ch. 1.

¹¹⁴ R. Garson, 'American Foreign Policy and the Limits of Power: Eastern Europe 1946-50' *JCH* 21 (3) (1986), pp. 347-366; Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics*, p. 24.

¹¹⁵ G. Roberts, 'Moscow and the Marshall Plan: Politics, Ideology and the Onset of the Cold War 1947' *EAS* 46 (8) (1994), pp. 1371-1386; C. Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World since 1917* (Arnold, London, 1998), pp. 91ff; also see G. Behrman, *The Marshall Plan and the Reconstruction of Post-War Europe* (Aurum Press, London, 2008).

partnership between the USA and Europe while others have argued that it was designed to 'foster American influence and power.'¹¹⁶ Economic motivations, though important, were secondary to political ones: the threat of an expansion of Communist influence in a war ravaged Europe was a gamble that the USA was not prepared to take. Britain necessarily had to pay more attention to what the State Department was saying and doing but by the same token did not want to be dragged into the conflict arising between the USA and the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷ Through taking advantage of the rising American fear of Communism, once the State Department had finalised its policy aims and methods, for example, containment, Bevin was as Greenwood has eloquently argued 'shackled to Washington's golden chariot'.¹¹⁸

While Britain undoubtedly courted and benefited from a closer transatlantic connection, it came at a price, as discussed above; although Britain's bases, military and economic potential made it an obvious ally anyway.¹¹⁹ The British attempt within this emerging alliance to steer the State Department towards policies more in line with British thinking was a mixed success. Ovendale quoted from official documents in his book which stated that 'Britain [had to] exert sufficient control over the policy of the well-intentioned but inexperienced colossus on whose cooperation our safety depends.'¹²⁰ While Roosevelt had been happy to follow more internationalist policies with the creation of a collective security organisation after the war, Britain emphasised its traditional policy of balance of power.¹²¹ The American wish for Britain to take a more active and leading role in Europe towards a European Union was vetoed by the Foreign Office as a threat to the British Empire and her national sovereignty.¹²²

Britain's relationship with the Soviet Union was even more difficult and ambiguous. Chances for closer cooperation between the wars had been missed, cementing the distrust

¹¹⁶ Behrman, *Marshall Plan*, p. 5; Leffler, *Preponderance*, p. 163.

¹¹⁷ Goldstein, 'The British Official Mind', p. 68; G. Ross, 'Foreign Office Attitudes towards the Soviet Union 1941-45' *JCH* 16 (3) (1981), p. 536.

¹¹⁸ Peden, *Arms, Economics and British Strategy*, p. 230; Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 49.

¹¹⁹ Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 81-82; Leffler, *Preponderance*, p. 183.

¹²⁰ R. Ovendale, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 42-43.

¹²¹ Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, ch. 4.

¹²² Callaghan, *The Labour Party*, p. 173 and 183.

of the Kremlin towards the West.¹²³ Pro-Soviet opinion among British policy makers and the public in general, a necessity during the war, made a quick reversal of policies in the face of increased Soviet recalcitrance difficult. There was no concert of powers but only two superpowers, one of which adhered to a strict if occasionally flexible ideology which advocated conflict with the Capitalist world. Both countries, Britain and the Soviet Union, Martin Folly has noted, were, however, adherent to pragmatism and realism, and both understood the importance of strength in international diplomacy.¹²⁴

British relations with the Soviet Union under Stalin were fraught with problems. The need to maintain cordial relations with the Kremlin, a Post Hostilities Planning Staff (PHPS) paper argued during the war, was essential in the containment of Germany after the allied victory.¹²⁵ Despite the experience of working closely with their Soviet counterparts, a real and potentially lasting basis of trust which would enable continued cooperation after the war was never established during the war. Churchill, like Stalin, recognised the importance of strength in international relations. He was a realist, occasionally given to flights of fancy, whose efforts for a better understanding with Stalin, according to David Carlton, were pretence; a claim vigorously disputed by Reynolds and Max Hastings.¹²⁶ The British government during and after the war simply may not have had a choice: Erik Hoffmann has argued that one of the enduring targets of Soviet foreign policy was the principal power in Europe which by 1945 after the defeat of Germany was Britain.¹²⁷ After the war, F.S. Northedge has noted in a revisionist argument, the new Labour government immediately moved away from cooperation with the Soviet Union.¹²⁸ This notion, after careful study of the available evidence, cannot really be sustained today.

Stalin, Zubok has contended, was a realist who was well prepared to 'squeeze as much out of his temporary capitalist partners as possible.'¹²⁹ An active desire to play off his former

¹²³ R. Manne, 'The Foreign Office and the failure of Anglo-Soviet rapprochement' *JCH* 16 (4) (1981), pp. 725-755; Ross, 'Foreign Office Attitudes'; M. Kitchen, *British Policy towards the Soviet Union during the Second World War* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1986).

¹²⁴ Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, p. 3, 6, 106.

¹²⁵ Ross, 'Foreign Office Attitudes', p. 530.

¹²⁶ D. Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000), p. 187; Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, p. 219; M. Hastings, *Finest Years: Churchill as War Lord, 1940-1945* (Harper Press, London, 2009).

¹²⁷ E. Hoffmann, 'Soviet Foreign Policy Aims and Accomplishments from Lenin to Brezhnev' *PAPS* 36 (4) (1987), p. 13.

¹²⁸ Northedge, *Britain and Soviet Communism*, p. 104.

¹²⁹ V. Zubok, *A Failed Empire* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2007), p. 22.

allies against each other was another way to create more opportunities for his foreign policy, and here he only followed Roosevelt's precedent who had sought closer relations with Stalin by occasionally trampling on Churchill.¹³⁰ Frank Roberts argued in 1945 that if Britain was firm with the Kremlin, there was no essential conflict between the two countries. Later, of course, he became much more pessimistic as to the outcome of the deteriorating international relations.¹³¹ The general debate argues that either Stalin was most interested in territorial integrity, national security and the consolidation of gains already made, or that he was actively seeking further expansion while exporting his revolutionary ideology abroad.¹³² In the end his faith in the accuracy of Communist ideology did not achieve what he desired.¹³³

That he created and further enhanced already existing tension cannot, I think, be denied, however, he just like Roosevelt/Truman and Churchill/Attlee had to take those decisions he thought best in the interest of his country. Stalin, Roberts noted, was interested in peaceful coexistence but could not realise his aims through the available methods of the Cold War, although, as Taubman has argued, cooperation had proven beneficial for him.¹³⁴ Stalin was doggedly determined not to loosen his grip on Eastern Europe. He thus mirrored the concept of containment spreading through Western foreign policy at a time when he was still on the defensive.¹³⁵ It was difficult, Antonio Varsori has argued, for all to understand the complexities of the new world emerging in Eastern Europe.¹³⁶ By the early 1950s with several conflicts still raging, Soviet foreign policy started to pursue a more stabilising policy within the Cold War.¹³⁷

Neither side wanted war nor actively pursued it. But tensions undoubtedly continued to rise. Stalin was at a loss of how to change Soviet policies to suit himself and to suit his former allies at the same time. The fewer countries at the end of a war were in a position to impose their views, the greater the impact and the longer the time until a final settlement,

¹³⁰ W. Taubman, *Stalin's Foreign Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War* (W.W. Norton, London, 1982), p. 83.

¹³¹ Ross, 'Foreign Office Attitudes', p. 534.

¹³² Leffler has argued that Stalin acted defensively, *Preponderance*, p. 186; Kennedy-Pipe noted that Stalin pursued both expansionist and cooperative policies, *Russia and the World*, p. 81.

¹³³ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 34.

¹³⁴ G. Roberts 'Stalin and Foreign Policy' in M. Leffler & D.S. Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (Routledge, London, 2005), pp. 42-58; Taubman, *Stalin's Foreign Policy*, p. 128.

¹³⁵ Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World*, p. 102; Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 40.

¹³⁶ A. Varsori & E. Calandri (eds.), *The Failure of Peace in Europe* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002), p. 8.

¹³⁷ Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics*, p. 35.

in this case two blocs in the Cold War, was reached. That the Soviet Union immediately after the war was the only Communist state in existence made this situation more difficult. With the emergence of other Communist states and subsequent splits between them, the international influence of the Kremlin evened out somewhat. As discussed above, the adherence to the concept of military strength as a key determinant of the impact of a country's foreign policy drove the Kremlin, just like the State Department and the Foreign Office, to emphasise the defence parameters in their foreign policies rather than those ideas with facilitated cooperation, like trade.¹³⁸

Soviet foreign policy achieved a lot despite all the odds but, of course, this is precisely what partially aggravated and continued the Cold War.¹³⁹ 'Stalin's political strategy', Donaldson and Nogee noted, 'combined opportunistic probing with caution about provoking a military reaction.'¹⁴⁰ The ensuing 'policy of tightfistedness and hard bargaining with the Russians' made negotiations even more difficult.¹⁴¹ That, after years of trying to find some accommodation with the Soviet Union, the Foreign Office by 1947/48 had shifted its emphasis towards a more confrontational outlook, was not surprising.¹⁴² Over two and a half years as the Foreign Ministers of the erstwhile allies negotiated, the situation had been deteriorating. Robert Manne has written that Britain sacrificed its relations with the Soviet Union over its unwillingness to settle the German question more in the Kremlin's favour; Deighton agrees, adding that the settling of the German question meant the abandonment of East Germany in favour of concentration on the West.¹⁴³

That Stalin used the worsening Cold War partly as a reason to force through more policies on social control in the Soviet Union has convincingly been demonstrated by Elena Zubkova.¹⁴⁴ Only by 1948 when consolidation in the East had proceeded faster than possibly anticipated did Western governments attempt to initiate a policy of 'roll-back' in

¹³⁸ V. Aspaturian, *Process and Power in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Little, Brown, Boston, 1971), p. 11.

¹³⁹ Aspaturian, *Process and Power*, pp. 87ff.

¹⁴⁰ J. Nogee & R. Donaldson, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests* (M.E. Sharpe, London, 1998), p. 75; C. Keeble, *Britain and the Soviet Union 1917-1989* (Macmillan, London, 1990), p. 209.

¹⁴¹ Smith, *Sharing Secrets with Stalin*, p. 251.

¹⁴² Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, pp. 284ff.

¹⁴³ Manne, 'The Foreign Office', p. 748; Deighton, 'Towards a Western Strategy', p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ E. Zubkova, *Russia after the war: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957* (ME Sharpe, London, 1998).

order to liberate the Eastern satellites.¹⁴⁵ As much as a settlement was desired by both sides, the emerging structures in both East and West restricted their governments' ability to offer incentives substantial enough to maintain cordial relations between the Allies and to negotiate arguments. By 1951 as Lord Strang has noted, there was no alternative to closer Anglo-American relations.¹⁴⁶ While the role of ideology in the East had been recognised, the new demand for, and emergence of, a set of coherent ideas in the West in Containment created a similar vocabulary of superiority, strength and conflict. The primacy of foreign policy had created new circumstances and thus demanded new solutions.

The failure, during the war, to agree a peace settlement, particularly for Germany and the Balkan states, proved a turning point.¹⁴⁷ Geoffrey Roberts noted that 'neutralising the German threat', which had been one of Soviet foreign policies most important issues, 'was a goal whose achievement was worth a high price', although, as Greenwood made clear, Germany still provided the common denominator between Britain and the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁸ Thereafter military realities, for example the presence of occupation forces, provided the lever to hold out during negotiations for better settlements. Not surprisingly, in 1945 with the Red Army occupying most of Central and Eastern Europe, the Foreign Office wanted to keep some cooperation with the Kremlin going; the old idea of spheres of influence, discussed between Churchill and Stalin in October 1944, was a concept that would survive the end of the war.¹⁴⁹ Whatever may have been said in private, Realpolitik stipulated that Britain kept up its diplomacy with the Soviet Union. Churchill, a fan of summit diplomacy, trusted Stalin to at least get things done. As the commitment of America to Europe was still uncertain, the Foreign Office was interested in maintaining good relations with the Kremlin just like the Soviet Union was interested in maintaining good relations with her former allies.¹⁵⁰ What Stalin did not realise, Gaddis argued, was that the change situation at the end of the war in return changed the possibilities and opportunities for Soviet foreign policy.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ B. Heuser, 'Covert Action within British and American Concepts of Containment, 1948-1951' in Aldrich, *British Intelligence*, pp. 65-84.

¹⁴⁶ Lord Strang quoted in Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁷ Varsori & Calandri, *The Failure of Peace*, p. 84.

¹⁴⁸ Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics*, p.38; Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁹ Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, pp. 237ff.

¹⁵⁰ Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, p. 277; Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 12.

¹⁵¹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 14.

The concept of Soviet Communism was difficult to grasp completely. Even now the arguments still rage over the question why such a system managed to survive for so long and why it exercised so much influence over international relations. It may have been single-minded determination and ruthless will: 'In Russia', John Gooding noted, 'the Socialist regime would itself create the conditions necessary for socialism rather than be created by them.'¹⁵² Ideology, as well as other factors was vital in understanding Soviet foreign and domestic policy.¹⁵³ Stalin's claim to leadership, initially not uncontested, lacked the sharp intellectualism of Lenin, and while Lenin favoured discussion, Stalin used trials and purges to consolidate his hold on the top of the party. 'Soviet leaders paraded as democrats while strengthening tyranny', Robert Service noted in *Comrades: Communism – A World History*.¹⁵⁴ Robert Conquest has argued with regards to Stalinism that 'the Westerner has a certain blockage against the real mental degradation of evil.'¹⁵⁵ While the evidence of this was noticed by foreign observers, they found it difficult to make sense of it. 'Kremlinology' became a widespread but not wholly persuasive science. Even weathered specialists could not argue their cases convincingly without much better information than that available.¹⁵⁶ Possibly that reason, the lack of enough and accurate information, led to a much closer focus on Soviet foreign policy in order to understand the political system behind it through its external relations than might otherwise have been the case. The portrayal of strength outward while denying information about the actual situation inside, led to a severe over-estimation of Soviet strength and was thus a factor in public anxiety and the severe American responses to Soviet foreign political muscle-flexing.¹⁵⁷

Hoffmann has helpfully listed the foreign policy aims of Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union to see if and where they overlap.¹⁵⁸ According to him they did not. Britain and the USA were interested in Western Europe, the UNO and the Far East (the order of priorities differed) and Britain, of course, still paid much attention to its empire. The Soviet Union, by comparison, was most interested in national security, control, reconstruction and

¹⁵² J. Gooding, *Socialism in Russia: Lenin and his Legacy, 1890-1991* (Palgrave, New York, 2002), pp. 8ff.

¹⁵³ H. Admoneit, 'Soviet Ideology, Risk-Taking, and Crisis Behaviour' in R. Laird & E. Hoffmann (eds.), *Soviet Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (Aldine Publishing Company, New York, 1986), p. 99.

¹⁵⁴ Service, *Comrades*, p. 225; see also Y. Gorlizki & O. Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953* (OUP, Oxford, 2004), p. 165, 169.

¹⁵⁵ R. Conquest, *Present Danger: Towards a Foreign Policy* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1979), p. 13.

¹⁵⁶ G. Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union 1917-1991* (Fontana, London, 1992), p. 313.

¹⁵⁷ C. Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007), p. 685; Taubman, *Stalin's Foreign Policy*, p. 104.

¹⁵⁸ Hoffmann, 'Soviet Foreign Policy Aims', pp. 17ff.

territory. International cooperation and security did not rank at all. Any threat to his perceived needs required a quick retaliation from Stalin, a man who understood power politics possibly better than anyone else. His new empire, Vojtech Mastny noted, proved both 'his triumph and his nemesis.' On the road to the Cold War, he concluded, 'Stalin was both a victim and an accomplice.'¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ V. Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1979), p. 224, 306.

Part Two. Cooperation and Opportunism, 1945 to 1947

Rather than focus on specific issues, like the Peace Campaign or Western European Defence which later emerged as important topics, the Foreign Office and the Northern Department after 1945 made a serious effort to 'take stock'. Britain's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and to a lesser extent the USA, and the foreign policy options now open to the British government were discussed at length to pinpoint the best options available and develop suitable foreign policy strategies.

After the upheavals of the war years the Foreign Office needed some time to settle back into the peacetime routine of information analysis and policy proposals. While initially reports sent in from abroad and discussion of them and other relevant material were the main means of debate, staff soon started to write papers detailing the available information and state of discussion on very specific issues. By the later 1940s their briefs were the main means of conveying complex information quickly and succinctly. Once the Moscow embassy had re-organised itself to work within peacetime parameters, closer attention paid again to the Soviet press which, for example, yielded large amounts of information for use in London. A Joint Press Reading Service between the British and the American embassies in Moscow spread this very time-intensive work over several staff and thus made important information available much quicker than it had previously been. The Northern Department during these years focused on the material that was readily available to build a picture of the Soviet Union and its interests abroad to gauge possible short and longer term objectives, and then pointed out opportunities for negotiation and realistic foreign policies.

The first part consists of three chapters. Chapter One will introduce the department and the most important officials while Chapter Two explains some of the most important aspects of Soviet domestic and foreign trends during these years to provide some background to the major Soviet foreign policies. Chapter Three looks at the discussion and formation of British foreign policy.

Chapter One: Institutions and personnel: The FO, the ND, and the Moscow Embassy, 1945-1947

This country could not again be used as an outpost to save other countries.

Notes of a conversation between Bevin and Zarubin, 27.1.1947¹⁶⁰

The Foreign Office and the Northern Department

To protect Britain from bullying by the Kremlin, or the State Department, and to maintain and enhance her ability to negotiate effectively, the Northern Department had to provide the best possible policy advice that had to be based on accurate and up to date information. Britain, as Bevin made clear to the Soviet ambassador, could not again find itself in a situation where it fought a powerful enemy almost alone. Having come through the war by the skin of her teeth and now having to face up to a vastly changed, and not yet fully comprehended, balance of political and economic power in the world, Britain could not but explore every avenue that could lead to an accommodation with Moscow. Initially this seemed the cheapest option of bridging the time until Britain had evaluated her choices more fully and had a chance to allow for a frank and realistic discussion of possible foreign policies in the immediate future. The most important person in this quest was undoubtedly the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin and the Foreign Office understood his importance to herself and her future role in the formation of British foreign policy.

For the Foreign Office to once again occupy the centre of foreign policy decision making after 1945 required a Foreign Secretary who was confident vis-à-vis the Prime Minister and who understood and valued his staff. Ernest Bevin had the full confidence of Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister until 1951.¹⁶¹ His relationship with the Prime Minister was close and trusting, and allowed for frank discussion as well as a significant level of autonomy in the day-to-day running of the Foreign Office. During the war the situation had been markedly different as Anthony Eden and Winston Churchill's relationship was fraught with difficulties. So much so that by the end of the war officials in the Foreign Office were

¹⁶⁰ FO371/66362-8109.

¹⁶¹ Although they too had their differences, Steiner, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office', p. 15; Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 228; Smith, 'A Climate of Opinion', p. 634; Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World', p. 225.

used to backing their Foreign Secretary against the Prime Minister.¹⁶² Aware of all the information available at the time and worried about the repercussions of potentially wrong decisions on the part of the Prime Minister, they consistently supported their Foreign Secretary.¹⁶³ Once Winston Churchill was re-elected Prime Minister in October 1951 after the Conservative election victory and Anthony Eden again became Foreign Secretary the relationship between Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary became difficult again once more. In 1945 the Foreign Office knew that Bevin was its direct route to the Cabinet and Prime Minister, and thus to the implementation of the policies they regarded as in Britain's best interest. They knew that he had to be persuaded first. Policy advice given therefore had to be persuasive, realistic and implementable.

Bevin, although appearing only on the fringes of this thesis, occupied a central place in Foreign Office structure and thinking. Major decisions were taken by him and only him, and therefore his views had to be taken into account when presenting information. His relationship with senior staff and his ability to direct their work was crucial to the fast and efficient work of the Office. Bevin, who inherited the post of Foreign Secretary from Anthony Eden after the Conservative defeat in the general election in July 1945, was central to British foreign policy between 1945 and his rather forced resignation due to severe illness in March 1951. As much as traditional historians may have glorified him and revisionist historians possibly argued too critical a case, he was central to ideas of Britain's place in the new post-war world and inspired fierce loyalty among those who worked with him.¹⁶⁴

Uneducated in a conventional sense, Bevin had nevertheless acquired considerable skills before and during the war that were to aid him after it. A man of much common sense and a lot of pragmatism, particularly in his dealings with the Soviet Union, he may well have been the rock that the Office needed after the upheavals of the pre-war and wartime period. Many, though not blind to his weaknesses, were impressed by his undoubted abilities. William Strang, who became Permanent Under-Secretary in 1949, recalled much later that

¹⁶² For this issue with regards to Bevin and Attlee disagreements about the strategic importance of the Middle East see, for example, Smith, 'A Climate of Opinion', p. 643; Kent has argued that it was precisely Bevin's interest in Britain's imperial possessions which persuaded the Foreign Office to refuse concessions to the Kremlin, 'British Policy and the Origins of the Cold War' in Leffler, M. (ed.), *Origins of the Cold War*, pp.155-167.

¹⁶³ Smith, 'A Climate of Opinion', p. 634.

¹⁶⁴ For example, Connell, *The Office*; Steiner, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office', p. 15.

‘his knowledge of that world [Bevin, according to Strang, saw the world as a complete whole], in its essential aspects, was profound.’¹⁶⁵ John Connell, in *The Office* pointed out the difficult international situation Bevin was confronted with, noting that ‘the scope and the gravity of the decisions which he had to take, and of the negotiations in which he had to take part were without parallel in British history.’¹⁶⁶ David Reynolds has described him along similar lines as ‘almost Churchillian in his attitudes.’¹⁶⁷

Frank Roberts, who served him most closely as a Principal Private Secretary after Pierson Dixon had been appointed ambassador to Prague, noted that ‘he was a man of vision’ with the ‘memory of an elephant.’ To him, writing in 1991, Bevin simply was ‘a great Englishman, warts and all, worthy to stand comparison in his own day with Churchill or in the past with such figures as Oliver Cromwell or Palmerston.’¹⁶⁸ Even though rose-tinted glasses may be obvious in Roberts’ comment, he does make the important point that Bevin was as important for Britain after 1945 as Churchill had been before it. Others disagree, of course. Zara Steiner wrote that Bevin by 1947 displayed ‘increasingly rigid and ideologically based anti-Soviet attitudes.’¹⁶⁹ Victor Rothwell also noted Bevin’s hostility towards the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁰ No doubt that Bevin’s anti-Soviet stance needs more research while the literature on British foreign policy and Anglo-Soviet relations, although extensive already, would nevertheless benefit from a closer examination of the role that ideology played for senior British foreign policy makers after 1945.

Although Bevin at times required a lot of persuading, when he finally had been convinced of the benefits of a particular policy he stood firmly behind it.¹⁷¹ Great policy shifts, such as the start of a more aggressive propaganda policy countering Communist propaganda in 1948 (which will be more closely discussed in Chapter Eight), had to be based on firm evidence and workable strategies and tactics as such policies were difficult to reverse. He thus took his time and then occasionally, as Raymond Smith has argued, ‘became trapped by the momentum of this official policy.’¹⁷² To institute said propaganda initiative the

¹⁶⁵ Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad*, p. 288.

¹⁶⁶ Connell, *The Office*, p. 305.

¹⁶⁷ Reynolds, *One World Divisible*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁸ F. Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators: The Destruction and Revival of Europe 1930-1970* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1991), p. 121 and 123.

¹⁶⁹ Steiner, ‘The Foreign and Commonwealth Office’, p. 15.

¹⁷⁰ Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 226 and 233.

¹⁷¹ He was not a ‘puppet in the hands of his officials’, Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 230.

¹⁷² Smith, ‘A Climate of Opinion’, p. 465.

setting up of a more specialised committee or department had been discussed but, as Christopher Mayhew, Parliamentary Under-Secretary between 1947 and 1950, recalled, 'Bevin was not persuaded' minuting that 'I am not enthusiastic for more machinery.'¹⁷³ Bevin here had, of course, a point. Machinery does not necessarily mean a more organised discussion or execution of a strategy. However, in the absence of a department that oversaw short and long-term policy proposals it was necessary to find an effective way of keeping all strands of policy proposals together; the establishment of the Permanent Under-Secretaries Department in 1949 was an attempt to resolve this problem. Some historians, nevertheless argue that the Office was too slow to adapt to new times and a diminished British world role.¹⁷⁴

The Permanent Under-Secretary was the Foreign Secretary's chief adviser, occasionally even receiving foreign ambassadors on his behalf. Usually appointed by the Foreign Secretary he was the head and most senior official in the Foreign Office, and thus responsible for the whole organisation. He was most likely someone who had had a distinguished career in the Foreign Service and this was sometimes the last assignment before retirement. Permanent Under-Secretaries, like other senior officials, were, as Gaynor Johnson has rightly pointed out, incredibly important for a sense of continuity within the Office; people who knew how the system worked and how it ought to be organised. Arguing along the same lines, Zara Steiner noted that Foreign Office ministers, acted like a 'departmental memory bank.'¹⁷⁵

Sir Alexander George Montagu Cadogan had been ambassador in Peking before taking up his post as Permanent Under-Secretary in January 1938 and thus served through the difficult pre-war and war years. He was, as Otte and Neilson contend, 'an invaluable advisor' to the Foreign Secretary.¹⁷⁶ Sir Orme Garton Sargent, who was appointed to the post in February 1946 had been Deputy Under-Secretary for nearly seven years prior to his appointment and led the Foreign Office during the challenging post-war years until February 1949. He, among others, as McKercher has pointed out, was at the 'heart of professionalism in British Foreign Policy'; well deserved and rather rare praise for a senior

¹⁷³ C. Mayhew, *A War of Words: A Cold War Witness* (I.B. Tauris, London, 1998), p. 33.

¹⁷⁴ Bishop, *The Administration of British Foreign Relations*, p. 288; Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 248.

¹⁷⁵ Steiner, *The Times Survey*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁶ Otte & Neilson, *The Permanent Under-Secretary*, p. 256.

civil servant.¹⁷⁷ Saville, extremely critical, has described him as ‘prejudiced, narrow-minded and politically illiterate.’¹⁷⁸ His successor, William Strang served until 1953. Strang was the only senior official who, between 1930 and 1933, had served in Moscow.¹⁷⁹ All were career civil servants who had previously worked in a variety of posts in the Foreign Office in London and abroad. They had a good relationship with the Foreign Secretary and proved indispensable to him, keeping him informed about developments as well as implementing reforms and new policies.

The Permanent Under-Secretary was supported on a senior level by three Deputy Under-Secretaries who supervised eight Assistant Under-Secretaries (these numbers occasionally varied). Each of them, Deputy and Assistant Under-Secretaries, supervised several departments, as superintending Under-Secretaries, and, on the basis of instructions from the Foreign Secretary, worked out policy guidelines and recommended courses of action. One example was Oliver Harvey, who, having been private secretary to Eden, became Assistant Under-Secretary in 1943 before being promoted to Deputy Under-Secretary in 1946. He worked in this post until 1948 when he was sent as ambassador to France. As in any big institution, there was always the chance to move vertically as well as horizontally, depending on expertise and experience. Supervising several departments was as challenging as it was interesting. In 1945, for example, Oliver Harvey headed the Western Department, dealing among others with Belgium, France, Italy and Europe General, and the German Department. In the same year Alexander Cadogan, then Permanent Under-Secretary, was in charge of the News and the Services Liaison Departments which in the early post-war years were usually under the supervision of the Permanent Under-Secretary.

The superintending Under-Secretaries, as the most senior officials working in the Foreign Office, supervised the departments. Their workload was often extremely heavy. For example, in 1946 and 1947 Christopher Frederick Ashton Warner supervised the Northern and the Southern Department in his capacity as Assistant Under-Secretary. In 1948 he became superintending Under-Secretary of the American Information Department, the Cultural Relations Department, the Western European Information Department, the Eastern European Information Department, the Latin American Information Department,

¹⁷⁷ B. McKercher, ‘The Foreign Office 1930-39: Strategy, Permanent Interests and National Security’ *CBH* 18 (3) (2004), p. 90.

¹⁷⁸ Saville, *The Politics of Continuity*, p. 17.

¹⁷⁹ Lord Strang, *Home and Abroad*.

the Far Eastern Information Department, the Information Policy Department and the Middle Eastern Information Department. Although unlikely to be aware of all the details of information passing through these departments, he would have read most if not all major papers leaving the department and would have taken part of the major policy debates within his departments. Such broad expertise also helped to put Soviet foreign policy into perspective and to identify likely sources of disagreements early on.

Sargent was the superintending Under-Secretary of the Northern Department until 1946 when he was succeeded by Christopher Warner who, as head of the department since 1942, knew its staff and work very well. When Sargent became Permanent Under-Secretary in 1946 Warner, not surprisingly, was promoted to Assistant Under-Secretary and succeeded him in this capacity as superintending Under-Secretary of the Northern Department where he remained for the next two years. Warner was followed in his post in 1948 by Charles Harold Bateman who took over until 1950 and who, in turn, was followed by the Oxford educated and experienced Andrew Napier Noble. Last but not least, Paul Mason, born in 1904 and educated at Cambridge, succeeded Noble in 1952 after becoming Assistant Under-Secretary in the same year.

These men were the most senior officials, apart from the Permanent Under-Secretary himself, whom staff in the Northern Department dealt with on a regular and often daily basis. Far from being Office ‘creatures’ they had served abroad and acquired an extensive knowledge of international affairs, (although none had worked in the British Embassy in Moscow) and of the workings of the Office and Whitehall. Their occasional demanding treatment towards their staff reflected this experience and the reality of the foreign policy formation process. They were advisers as well as gatekeepers of information, and their guidance and expertise was crucial to the work of the department. All important papers and memoranda would go through their hands before being passed on to the Foreign Secretary, the Cabinet or Parliament. They often commented on issues they thought were not clear or which had to be re-thought. It was their responsibility to ensure that the papers eventually arriving at Bevin’s desk were well-written, accurate, realistic and had taken all important issues connected to a particular topic into account. For this reason, many papers were re-written several times to ensure that only those of the highest quality reached the Foreign Secretary.

Under the superintending Under-Secretary worked the Head of the department who had everyday supervisory duties for the department's staff. He was the first port of call for questions and would read anything that was to go higher up the seniority chain in the office. Warner, already mentioned above, had provided continuity during the war since 1942 and was succeeded by Robin Maurice Alers Hankey in February 1946 who remained Head of the Northern Department until 1949. In November 1949 he was appointed chargé d'affaires in Madrid and left London. Geoffrey Harrison, a few years younger than Hankey, took up the post of Head of department having served in Tokyo, Berlin and Brussels. Experience abroad was of vital importance when assessing information, and the Foreign Office was well aware that such expertise was needed in order to avoid any form of tunnel vision which could easily develop when one was stationed exclusively in London. Henry Arthur Frederick Hohler, the Head between 1952 and 1953, came from a slightly different background. Born in 1911 he attended Eton before studying at the Royal Military College in Camberley.

Service in Moscow was very important for a better understanding of the Soviet Union and its domestic and foreign policies. Some of the staff in the Department, in particular junior officials like Thomas Brimelow, Joseph Dobbs and Hugh Morgan would or had at one time spent time in Moscow and had therefore gained first hand experience not only of the country and its leaders but also of the problems of working there. Living in the country revealed more about it than any book in the admittedly extensive Foreign Office library ever could do. This library held, and still holds, an extensive collection of books dealing with any aspect of foreign countries deemed important for the formulation of British foreign policy. Thousands of volumes were at hand to enhance the knowledge of those appointed to a particular post or department. Several times in the documents staff referred to the library as their first port of call in order to read up on all aspects of Soviet history, foreign policy and ideology, in particular.

The Northern Department Soviet desk was a very demanding post and many who worked here later went on to have great Foreign Office careers. The Northern Department's junior staff, constituting the centre of this thesis, also deserve an introduction. Among the first to feature prominently in the documents examined for this thesis is Thomas Brimelow. Born in 1915, and thus one of the younger officials in the department, he joined the Foreign Service in 1938 as the best in the Civil Service examination that year. Intelligent and

resourceful he served, among other places, in Riga in 1939 and in Moscow between 1942 and 1945. The historian John Zametica argued that ‘he was perhaps the only person in the entire Foreign Office who could plausibly be described as a Russian expert.’¹⁸⁰ Although his tough line vis-à-vis the Kremlin has been criticised by some historians, his outlook was actually much more nuanced.¹⁸¹ He certainly never argued a case without backing it up with detailed evidence.

Other junior officials equally made their mark on the work of the department. Although not all could be found in the *Foreign Office List* or the *Dictionary of National Biography* the details of several of them are available. John Galsworthy worked at the Soviet desk of the Northern Department in 1945 and 1946. Thomas Brimelow, already mentioned above, joined the Department after his return from Moscow in June 1945 and stayed until 1948 when he was sent to Havana; it was a general procedure of the Foreign Office to rotate staff to broaden their knowledge and expertise. Brimelow returned in 1951 to take over the newly formed Russian Secretariat at the British Embassy in Moscow until 1954. He was an outstanding Soviet specialist who contributed hugely to the Department’s expertise. John Pumphrey, after three years in the Foreign Office, was posted to the Department in 1946 where he stayed for a year and thus worked with both Galsworthy and Brimelow during the difficult early post-war years. A. E. Lambert, after fourteen years of Foreign Office experience, started in the Department in 1947 and remaining there until 1949. His experience in the Near East prior to this post, was undoubtedly an advantage to the Department during the early post-war crises in Turkey and Iran. Starting just after Lambert’s arrival C. R. A. Rae, Eton and Cambridge educated, had entered the Foreign Office in 1947 and, although the *Foreign Office List* unfortunately does not provide exact dates, likely joined the Northern Department as his first post.

The personnel changes in 1951 as apparent in the *Foreign Office List* show that there was a significant change with no continuing service for any member of staff who had worked there prior to 1951. The reason is not clear but may well have been a result of regular rotation of staff. One important improvement was notable though: the Soviet desk now had four instead of the previous three staff, in 1953 there were even six staff. While most of

¹⁸⁰ J. Zametica, ‘Three letters to Bevin’ in Zametica, *British Officials and British Foreign Policy*, p. 62; Folly has argued that the ‘experts were the junior and the all-rounders were the seniors’, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, p. 5.

¹⁸¹ Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 19.

them are elusive two can be introduced in more detail. Hugh Travers Morgan, had served in Moscow between May 1948 and May 1950. He joined the department in 1951, where he remained until 1953, and provided much needed first hand experience of the Soviet Union during a time of increasing political Cold-warfare worldwide. Equally, Joseph Alfred Dobbs joined the Department in 1953 with extensive experience of the Soviet Union. He had served in Moscow from 1949 until 1951 and had been appointed Head of the Russian Secretariat at the British Embassy in Moscow in October 1950.

The skill of these officials to assess the most important and pressing points first, to distil large amounts of data into memoranda often only a few pages long and to write clearly for an audience that often was not necessarily intimately familiar with the intricacies of Soviet ideology, Soviet history or the Soviet bureaucracy and governmental system greatly enhanced understating of the Soviet Union. Their care in accumulating the knowledge to give precise and accurate summaries and policy proposals were hugely important in allowing the Permanent Under-Secretary, the Foreign Secretary and Cabinet to decide the best options for British foreign policy initiatives. Their importance in providing a mostly realistic, pragmatic and implementable foreign policy, should not, as this thesis will show, be underestimated.

The flow of information within the Department and the Foreign Office in general during this period appears, as far as can be seen from the sources, flexible and well organised. Staff commented on the most important or pressing points and passed the file to their head of department who would, in turn, send it on to his superiors. All would minute their ideas and arguments on sheets attached to the original telegram or memorandum and it is thus possible to follow the argument from bottom to top. Increasingly, after 1945 information which demanded a specific expertise was sent for further comment to the Foreign Office Research Department (FORD), the Economic Intelligence Department (EID) or to the Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB) which collated intelligence gathered through military channels and reported to the Chiefs of Staff (COS) and the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC). Once all relevant staff or departments had commented on a particular telegram or memorandum, a summary was written or a separate memorandum was requested to link this information with other facts or policy ideas. These memoranda, usually written for the Russia Committee, the Foreign Secretary or British delegations to Conferences etc, often included detailed policy proposals or suggested methods of dealing with a particular issue. One

piece of information, therefore, may well travel up and down the Foreign Office hierarchy gaining volume in the process.

To deal more efficiently with the increase in information and the changed international scene after 1945, several committees were set up in the Foreign Office. Important and best known in the historiography was the Russia Committee.¹⁸² Set up after advice from both Warner and Frank Roberts, it first met on April 2nd, 1946. Although the Northern Department was not in charge of the Russia Committee, it played a central role in it thanks to its expertise of Soviet affairs. The Russia Committee assessed information relevant to the Soviet Union and its worldwide policies, requested specific reports and debated policy options and methods. The initial members consisted of all the Assistant and Deputy Under-Secretaries. Over the years this membership grew in accord with changes in policy and the demands of policy implementation, and included representatives from the BBC, the Services, the Treasury and later the Permanent Under-Secretaries Department and the Information Research Department (IRD). The IRD itself was established in late 1947 to organise and co-ordinate the recently agreed policy of a 'defensive-offensive' propaganda campaign against the ever increasing worldwide Communist propaganda campaign which is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

While this represented a large pool of expertise, the task for officials participating in the meetings of the Russia Committee was far from easy. Multiple Soviet policy initiatives across multiple fronts following various strategies and using varying tactics required a different sort of expertise. Here, the Northern Department in conjunction with Foreign Office Research Department (FORD) undoubtedly made a difference. Staff at the Soviet desk provided detailed memoranda on a large number of topics to aid discussion and to lay out the choices available. Ideology, for example, and the state of Soviet industry and armed forces became focal points for the assessment of the country as a potential military adversary, in particular after the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. Information about the continuing weakness of the Soviet economy provided the background for the discussion of using economic pressure as a 'hard' policy option in negotiations with the Soviet Union. Ideology, on the other hand, opened up the 'softer' option of cultural warfare within the ongoing propaganda battle. The Cultural Relations Department, which

¹⁸² Merrick, 'The Russia Committee'; see Russia Committee notes in FO 371/56885.

kept an eye on international organisations and intervened covertly if required, was by then already up and running.¹⁸³

The Moscow Embassy

In 1954 William Hayter raised the question whether, considering the virtual isolation of the embassy, expense issues and the never-ending harassment of staff, Britain should maintain its embassy in Moscow.¹⁸⁴ Many years later Rodrick Braithwaite, ambassador to the Soviet Union in the 1990s, raised the same point arguing that the embassy really did not do much.¹⁸⁵ These were not the first times the issue was raised. During the severe harassment of foreign embassies in Eastern Europe in the late 1940s this point was discussed several times. The Chiefs of Staff, however, always maintained that eyes and ears on the ground would be invaluable in case of a future military conflict. Information, all recognised, was key to any strategy, tactic and approach to foreign policy initiatives. As Donald Bishop wrote in *The Administration of British Foreign Relations* 'the Foreign Office cannot rise above the level of information provided to it, and the diplomat cannot rise above the level of the policy instructions sent to him from London.'¹⁸⁶ Lord Strang agreed.¹⁸⁷

The Foreign Office in London was politically impotent without accurate information given to it by its missions abroad. These were the institutions that would at times provide the impetus for a new policy or strategy towards a particular country. Primary information about Soviet domestic and foreign affairs came nearly exclusively from the embassy in Moscow. Although work and life in the Soviet Union was very difficult for those who were posted there, their work was incredibly important for their colleagues in London. First hand information, bits of conversations overheard or things seen in shops, changes in the presence of military or security forces around the capital or the personal appearance of Soviet leaders were important information that could not be gained from out-with the country.¹⁸⁸ Staff soon acquired substantial experience of extracting useful information from scarce sources but their task was nevertheless very difficult. One embassy, including

¹⁸³ Aldrich, 'Putting Culture into the Cold War'.

¹⁸⁴ W. Hayter, *The Kremlin and the Embassy* (Hodder and Stoughton, Suffolk, 1987), p. 40.

¹⁸⁵ M. Hopkins, 'Worlds apart: The British Embassy in Moscow and the Search for East-West Understanding' *CBH* 14 (3) (2000), p. 138.

¹⁸⁶ Bishop, *The Administration of British Foreign Relations*, p. 288.

¹⁸⁷ Lord Strang, *The Foreign Office*, p. 18.

¹⁸⁸ For a discussion about possible sources of information during the war see Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, pp. 40-44.

a military mission, reported on a country many times the size of Britain. Working conditions were difficult and required patience and perseverance: David Kelly, the ambassador, had noted in early 1951 that 'it was very hard from the ivory tower of this embassy' to assess Soviet internal affairs.¹⁸⁹

British representation in the Soviet Union had been complicated.¹⁹⁰ Those diplomats who were posted to the Soviet Union after the revolution and Civil War had experienced the abject poverty but also the excitement of the promise of Communist ideology and social progress. By the 1930s much of that excitement had gone when the realisation had grown that another large country was being turned into a totalitarian dictatorship. They worked in what many saw as a very undesirable post. Thomas Preston, stationed in Moscow in the late 1920s, thought of the embassy as a 'luxurious prison'.¹⁹¹ Most were glad when after about 3 years, according to Foreign Office routine, they were posted somewhere else. The Moscow embassy in 1945 was a rather small affair. Headed by Sir Archibald Kerr it comprised of only fourteen staff. In addition, there was at least one service attaché, seconded to the embassy from the British Ministry of Defence. By 1947 the number of staff had swollen to 33 but by 1953 there were only 15 staff. This decrease in numbers was a result of the increasing paranoia of the Soviet leadership about possible espionage. In comparison, the British Embassy in Washington in 1953 had 58 staff while the Soviet Embassy in London in the same year had 39 staff.

Between 1945 and 1947 there were two British ambassadors in Moscow. Sir Archibald Clark Kerr served in Moscow between 1942 and 1946.¹⁹² In October 1945 he had told Bevin that having spent four years with Molotov was quite enough for any man.¹⁹³ He was then posted to Washington in 1946 succeeding Lord Halifax. Clark Kerr's successor, Sir Maurice Drummond Peterson was appointed to Moscow in March 1946 where he remained until June 1949. Moscow was to be his last appointment.¹⁹⁴ Both men had

¹⁸⁹ FO371/94805-0850, 'Outline of Soviet Policy for the Re-organisation of the Soviet Countryside', 6.4.1951.

¹⁹⁰ See M. Hughes, *Inside the Enigma: British Officials in Russia, 1900-1939* (The Hambledon Press, London, 1997); for more information on the organisation of British embassies see Busk, *The Craft of Diplomacy*.

¹⁹¹ Hughes, *Inside the Enigma*, p. 196.

¹⁹² D. Gillies, *Radical Diplomat: The Life of Archibald Clark Kerr, Lord Inverchapel, 1882 – 1951* (I.B. Tauris, London, 1999).

¹⁹³ Zametica, 'Three Letters to Bevin', p. 64.

¹⁹⁴ His memoir is *Both Sides of the Curtain: An Autobiography* (Constable, London, 1950).

extensive expertise in diplomatic matters; a necessary basis for the difficult post that was Moscow where skill and experience were vital for the conduct of diplomacy. Both were briefed extensively before taking up their posts and were routinely called back to London to be updated on important developments in person. Diplomatic reality in Moscow certainly was very difficult and regular ambassadorial work though not impossible was very challenging. Lord Strang, who had been to Moscow, noted in his book *The Foreign Office* that a diplomatist really was occasionally a 'soft buffer between hard surfaces.'¹⁹⁵

To acquire the information needed and demanded in London, for example economic data or information about particular events or people, was difficult and this situation left staff in Moscow with a number of serious problems. Ever decreasing cooperation with their Soviet counterparts meant less face to face contact and less opportunity to directly gauge the reaction of Soviet leaders to particular problems. It also meant that information had to come nearly exclusively from second hand sources, like newspapers, radio and propaganda material. In addition, staff increasingly found that their travels were restricted to Moscow and a few major cities. A possible source of first hand information, actual contact with Soviet people, very quickly disappeared. New Soviet campaigns on vigilance in the face of the perceived encirclement of the country by the capitalist class enemy encouraged a new wave of denunciations. As a result most were afraid to be seen talking to foreigners. Soviet staff at the embassy, often known to be reporting to the Ministry of Internal Security, periodically disappeared only to be replaced by new informers. Because of this difficulty of obtaining reliable information it is not surprising, that the flow of reports to London was not constant and that there were considerable gaps.

In other respects, however, reporting from a totalitarian country had its advantages. All information in the public sphere, in newspapers, radio broadcasts etc, was at least partially sanctioned by the government and thus reflected its opinions. There was virtually no information that was independent or opposed to the existing regime. Bearing the insufficient supply of radios and the size of the country in mind, newspapers and magazines were essentially the only source of information for the vast majority of the population. Radios channels were routinely monitored by embassy staff and news items analysed just like regular newspaper articles. If something was important enough for the

¹⁹⁵ *The Foreign Office* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1955), p. 18.

government to be concerned about or necessary for all to know, the press was the only conduit that guaranteed full coverage. The embassy, of course knew that a lot of the information in the official press was likely to have been manipulated. The difficulty was to assess what was likely to be true and possible reasons behind the manipulations. To live, as the members of the British embassy did, in an enclave that was highly controlled and riddled with rumours and suspicions made this task even harder. The assessment of available information was really akin to something the Foreign Office liked to call 'crystal gazing'. It was above all the skill of the staff that turned official Soviet information into something useful to the Foreign Office.

While diplomats and staff generally felt well treated by London, differences of opinion between the centre and the periphery were not rare. Moscow staff were much closer to Soviet affairs while staff in London had more information available to them. Moscow argued for continuing negotiations with the Kremlin long after the Foreign Office had decided that a tougher line had to be taken to protect Britain's interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. The Embassy, feeling it was closer to the heart of the matter and more intimately familiar with the nuances of Soviet diplomatic manoeuvres, repeatedly argued for caution in dealing with the Kremlin.¹⁹⁶ It is probably true that, despite being far away from the Foreign Office and its information and debates, and despite having very limited contact with Soviet leaders, the Moscow Embassy had a better feeling for the peculiarities and sensibilities of the Soviet leaders. On the other hand, it is also true that some who had served in the Soviet Union were now working in the Northern Department and therefore should have been aware of these issues as well. Nevertheless, it is generally the people on the ground who can give important advice about the leaders and policies of the countries to which they are posted.

Although the occasional nudging from Moscow may have ruffled feathers in London, it was certainly good that a variety of opinions were offered for discussion. Many times issues were raised from Moscow in a way that had not been considered in London. It was precisely this, the ability and confidence to argue with and against commonly held views, which enhanced the overall discussion and ensured that policy decisions were not taken lightly. Many saw Bevin and the difficult international scene after 1945 as a chance to

¹⁹⁶ Zametica, 'Three Letters to Bevin', p. 49.

regain Foreign Office purview over foreign relations.¹⁹⁷ If the Northern Department, and the Foreign Office in general, were to benefit from Bevin's stature as Foreign Secretary it had to earn his trust. The only way to achieve this was to provide good policy advice based on accurate and well analysed information about the Soviet Union and Soviet affairs.

¹⁹⁷ Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World', p. 225.

Chapter Two: The Northern Department view of the Soviet Union and Soviet foreign policy, 1945-1947

A judicious blend of bamboozle, bluster and bluff.

Ronald report on the Soviet Union, 1.11. 1946¹⁹⁸

The years between 1945 and 1947 saw a Soviet Union that in its core had remained the same but that in its domestic and foreign political ambition had also changed significantly. Victory in 1945 had come at a high cost. Vast swathes of the West and South of the country had been devastated, industry had been moved, millions of lives had been lost and many had been left disabled.¹⁹⁹ Communist Party control of the localities had been significantly weakened especially in those areas that had been occupied by the German army. Party membership, which had been increased in part to admit soldiers and ensure at least a measure of ideological control of the army, had diluted the solid knowledge base of the Party in the process and partially ended the elitism of the Party. Millions of returning slave labourers and prisoners of war added their views to the flood of knowledge of the outside world which now had to be reined back in to allow a return to a uniform view and acceptance of Communist ideology as the basis of Soviet government and society. The war also proved an emotional and political watershed. It became the main reference point for many people in their history, often displacing the events of the 1930s or re-interpreting them.²⁰⁰ While the emergence to the status of superpower offered potentially great rewards with regards to foreign affairs, this was not a bonus available in the domestic arena.²⁰¹

As a result of the wartime devastation and post-war confusion the Soviet government immediately concentrated on domestic issues. Repatriation of those still abroad was one priority, the preservation of internal control and the strengthening of the Communist Party

¹⁹⁸ FO371/56887-N14732/5169/G38, report for the RC.

¹⁹⁹ For exact figures see Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union*, pp. 297ff, Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, pp. 20ff; R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia: From Nicholas II to Putin* (Penguin Books, London, 2003), pp. 293ff; T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (Pimlico, London, 2007), pp. 18ff; for a discussion about the economic implications of the war see, for example, S. Linz, 'Measuring the carryover cost of WWII to the Soviet People, 1945-1953' *EEH* 20 (4) (1983), pp. 375-386; the financial basis of the Soviet war effort is discussed in J. Millar, 'Financing the Soviet effort in WWII' *SS* 32 (1) (1980), pp. 106-123.

²⁰⁰ A. Weiner, 'The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity' *RR* 55 (4) (1996), pp. 638-660; Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, p. 34.

²⁰¹ See FO371/47870, 47923, 47924, 47925, 56728, 56734, 56756, 56759, 56835, 56883 and 66290.

was another. Repatriation was pursued by the Kremlin with iron determination.²⁰² It came in the wake of demobilisation of the Red Army, particularly after the end of the war in the Far East, and naturally was a major concern of the Foreign Office.²⁰³ The virtual occupation of Central and Eastern Europe by Allied and Soviet forces had opened up foreign political opportunities as both sides had quickly realised. Domestic control was another pressing issue with frequent reports of lawlessness making the headlines in the Soviet Union.²⁰⁴ The vast slave labour force in the Gulag, which had contributed to victory, was a further problem that needed addressing; a partial post-war amnesty released millions of prisoners during the summer of 1945.²⁰⁵

The enforcement of internal cohesion as the basis of Communist control, and the further acceleration of industrialisation and collectivisation (the newly acquired areas in the Baltic States, for example, had to be incorporated into the system), both ultimately designed to increase Soviet military capabilities, were deemed vitally important in order to maintain and expand the newly gained role of Great Power in a world still recognised as hostile. The Communist Party, aware of these and the many other pressing issues, strengthened Party control over central and local affairs while simultaneously restructuring the party and its admission system to secure a more ideologically educated, homogenous and trustworthy membership. An iron grip on the whole country and all its inhabitants was deemed vital for the perceived post-war struggle with the capitalist West. Life for the population was bleak; the Russia Committee argued in late 1946 that ‘there is little or no trace of applied Communism in Russia.’²⁰⁶ The country was undoubtedly totalitarian.

The elections to the Supreme Soviet held in February 1946 were the first countrywide opportunity for major policy announcements and a streamlining of Communist propaganda.²⁰⁷ Important speeches by all leading party members demanded a return to

²⁰² The files for General Ratov’s Mission to the UK are in FO 371/ 47855 and 47894; many did not wish to return and some were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union, see Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 30; Service, *Comrades*, p. 226.

²⁰³ Files dealing with demobilisation are in FO371/ 47854, 47858, 47894, 47917, 47925, 47954, 48005, 56724, 56725, 56848 and 56849.

²⁰⁴ See, for example, Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, p. 37.

²⁰⁵ In July 1945 the Supreme Soviet announced an amnesty decree releasing hundreds of thousands into the workforce, G. Alexopoulos, ‘Amnesty 1945: The revolving door of Stalin’s Gulag’ *SR* 64 (2) (2005), pp. 274-306; J. Keep, *Last of the Empires* (OUP, Oxford, 1995), pp. 10; A. Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (Allen Lane, London, 2003).

²⁰⁶ Ronald memorandum discussed in the FO371/56887-N14732/5169/G38.

²⁰⁷ Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, ch. 8.

ideological conformity, hard work and more sacrifice. Ideology regained its primary importance for all aspects of life and Communism was held out as a carrot for the Soviet donkey.²⁰⁸ The election also massively promoted the new Five Year Plan (the Fourth since 1928) which became law on March 21st, 1946.²⁰⁹ Industrial managers and local party administrators were put under severe pressure to restructure and deliver. Peasants, at the bottom of the social hierarchy and used to substantial suffering, found that their lot deteriorated significantly.²¹⁰ The widespread famine of 1946 again demonstrated the vulnerability of the countryside and the knock-on effects it had on the towns and cities, and thus on industrial recovery and progress.²¹¹ It became a top priority for the Kremlin after 1945 to manage and eventually escape this continuing dependence on passively resisting peasants.

While the Party, industry and agriculture were brought back into line, the Kremlin dealt with another issue that more than those just mentioned aroused the suspicion of the West about Soviet domestic matters: the Leningrad Writers affair which erupted in the summer of 1946.²¹² Zhdanov's 1934 vision of Soviet writers as 'engineers of human souls' had apparently not produced the desired results. The relaxed rules during the war, when writers such as Konstantin Simonov and Vasily Grossman proved exceptionally popular and did much to enhance the Soviet war effort, were reversed. Now ideological conformity was tightened again; 'an ideological house-cleaning' was in progress, as was noted at the time.²¹³

Stalin, sixty five at the end of the war and undoubtedly in charge of his government, had during the war relied increasingly on his colleagues. With influence naturally came power and this resulted in an ongoing debate, in foreign circles, about divisions within the

²⁰⁸ FO371/86711-N8772/1015/38/49, ND comment on FORD paper, 'The transition to Communism', 20.1.1950.

²⁰⁹ Economic data was notoriously difficult to assess, see, for example, the debate between S. Rosenfielde, 'The Riddle of Post-war Russian economic growth: Statistics lied and were misconstrued' *EAS* 55 (3) (2003), pp. 469-481 and M. Harrison, 'Post-war Russian economic growth: Not a riddle' *EAS* 55 (8) 8 (2003), pp. 1323-1329.

²¹⁰ Keep, *Last of the Empires*, pp. 19ff.

²¹¹ Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, ch. 4, 6.

²¹² For details see FO371/ 56730, 56733, 56734, 66380; Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, ch. 9; Gorlizki & Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, pp. 31ff.

²¹³ FO371/56734-N13480/24/38, US embassy report given to UK Moscow Embassy, 'Internal political and social developments in the Soviet Union during August 1946', 10.9. 1946.

Kremlin.²¹⁴ We now know that the conflict between Georgi Malenkov and Andrei Zhdanov was probably the most virulent.²¹⁵ But it is still not clear, how much control over particularly foreign policy Stalin's lieutenants really exercised. A relatively small purge beginning in 1946, affecting Molotov and Malenkov among others, removed those from their positions of power who were perceived by Stalin as too independent and served as a reminder of Stalin's continuing power. The Politburo, as the core of the decision making process, became ever more important during Stalin's last years and Stalin paid close attention to it.²¹⁶

Soviet foreign policy during the early post-war years was difficult to assess, and foreign intelligence here played a still relatively little researched role.²¹⁷ Frequent changes in tactics made the overall evaluation of its ultimate strategy and aims challenging.²¹⁸ Lacking specific information and at times confused by contradicting policy announcements, experts had no choice but to use precedent, educated guess work and intuition. Even when there were statements by senior leaders, for example Stalin's speech on the eve of the election to the Supreme Soviet in February 1946 or Zhdanov's speech at the Cominform foundation conference in September 1947, it proved tricky to unravel the problematic relationship between politics and propaganda. The importance of ideology, of possible alternative opinions within the Kremlin, and of continuities and change between the old Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union that now found itself in a position of international power were difficult to quantify.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Some argue against any divisions in the Kremlin, O. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009), pp. 247.

²¹⁵ J. Harris, 'The Origins of the Conflict between Malenkov and Zhdanov: 1939-1941' *SR* 35 (2) (1976), pp. 287-303; J. Harris, *The Split in Stalin's Secretariat* (Lexington Books, Plymouth, 2008), pp. 77; S. Pons, 'Stalinism and Party Organisation, 1933-1948' in J. Channon, (ed.), *Politics, Society and Stalinism in the USSR* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 107ff.

²¹⁶ Gorlizki & Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, pp. 46-58, Harris, *The Split in Stalin's Secretariat*, pp. 87, E. Mawdsley, 'An Elite within the Politburo/Presidium Membership under Stalin, 1927-1953' in E. A. Rees, (ed.), *The Nature of Stalin's Dictatorship* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 59-78.

²¹⁷ H. Romerstein & E. Breindel, *The Venona Secrets: Exposing Soviet Espionage and America's Traitors* (Regnery Publishing, Washington, DC, 2001); C. Andrews & J. Elkner, 'Stalin and Foreign Intelligence' in H. Shukman, *Redefining Stalinism* (Frank Cass, London, 2003); P. Hennessy, *The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War* (Penguin Books, London, 2003), prelude.

²¹⁸ Folly noted three distinct policies: the 'bear', indicating a 'hostile and aggressively expansive foreign policy, the 'lone wolf', suggesting an 'isolationist and uncooperative' government, and the 'retriever puppy', suggesting some form of cooperation, Churchill, *Whitehall and the Soviet Union*, p. 76.

²¹⁹ This new position led to a greater focus on Great Power politics, Noguee & Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 1; Judt has argued this it was vital for the understanding of Soviet policies, *Postwar*, p. 119.

While the Alliance was sustained during the war, no side really put a lot of effort into sustaining it afterwards.²²⁰ Even though both sides professed to work for continued cooperation, political realities and opposing views of a post-war settlement meant that it died a slow death after 1945.²²¹ The wartime conferences, although establishing the main parameters for the envisaged post-war Europe, had already highlighted the differences between the Allies.²²² Stalin's inability to understand the viewpoints and concerns of his former Allies, or his unwillingness to take them into account, was a significant problem.²²³ This is an important point: with regards to the Soviet leadership one could not hope that they saw the world as Western leaders did. Expansion of direct influence, Soviet and American, both with arguably similar aims but different strategies, was not a post-war development but had started during the war.²²⁴ The Conferences of Foreign Ministers (CFM) meeting between September 1945 and December 1947 exposed incompatible differences, and resulted in a severe disappointment about the lack of progress. Post-war political, military and economic strengthening of both sides out-with the UNO and the CFM soon solidified the emerging division between the Allies.

Eastern Europe, understood by Stalin as largely within his sphere of influence after the October 1944 agreement with Churchill, a fact accepted (though not openly) by the US State Department, was important to Britain for several reasons: Poland had provided the *raison d'être* for entering the war in the first place while the security of the most southern part of Eastern Europe was considered vital for British imperial defence and communication.²²⁵ European trade was another important concern. The most difficult issue

²²⁰ For a discussion about the Wartime Alliance see S. Davies, 'Soviet perceptions of the Allies during the Great Patriotic War' in C. Brennan & M. Frame (eds.), *Russia and the Wider World in Historical Perspective* (Macmillan Press, Houndsmills, 2000); G. Gorodetsky, 'The Origins of the Cold War: Stalin, Churchill and the Formation of the Grand Alliance' *RR* 47 (2) (1988), pp. 145-170; S. Kudryashov, 'Stalin and the Allies: Who deceived Whom?' *HT* 45 (5) (1995), pp. 13-19; Judt noted that four years of alliance could not eradicate decades of suspicion, *Postwar*, p. 103.

²²¹ Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World*, p. 81; G. Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics* (1999), p. 14.

²²² V. Mastny, 'Soviet War Aims at the Moscow and Teheran Conferences of 1943' *JMH* 47 (3) (1975), pp. 481-504.

²²³ V. Mastny, 'Stalin and the Militarisation of the Cold War' *IS* 9 (3) (1984/1985), pp. 109-129; Taubmann, *Stalin's American Policy*, p. 114; Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics*, p. 21.

²²⁴ R.C. Raack, 'Stalin's Plans for World War II' *JCH* 28 (1) (1993), pp. 53-73.

²²⁵ T.D. Sfikas, 'Toward a Regional Study of the Origins of the Cold War in South Eastern Europe: British and Soviet Policies in the Balkans, 1945-1949' *JMGS* 17 (1999), pp. 209-227; J.M. Siracusa, 'The Night Stalin and Churchill Divided Europe: The View from Washington' *RP* 43 (3) (1981), pp. 381-409; Zbigniew Brzezinski has argued that Yalta was an example of the Soviet attempt to win Western approval for Soviet dominance of Eastern Europe, 'The Future of Yalta' in Laird & Hoffmann, *Soviet Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (W. De Gruyter, New York, 1986), pp. 949-956.

to resolve, however, was Germany.²²⁶ Concerns and demands about territory, reparations, political control and economic unity proved impossible to negotiate. Although of central importance to both sides, none had had a viable plan for it when the war ended and the failure to solve this central post-war problem was a vital ingredient in the development of the Cold War.²²⁷

Stalin's foreign policy was as much the product of history, precedent and experience as of personality.²²⁸ It was also, however, the result of a narrow ideological construct that left limited room for manoeuvre and of a vast bureaucratic machine that was unable to function like its Western counterparts.²²⁹ Within this ideological construct a conflict with the capitalist West was for Stalin unavoidable.²³⁰ Whether or not Stalin, using the defence of national security in the face of 'Capitalist encirclement', actively sought expansion is still debated. The issue was often not necessarily his justification for a particular policy but the methods used to realise it.²³¹ This was much evident in his policy of consolidating and partially Sovietising Eastern Europe after 1945, using forced nationalisation and collectivisation, rigged elections, the elimination of rivals in show trials and the increased enforcement of ideological conformity in the aftermath of Tito's defiance in 1948.²³² Realism was part of the equation, but similarly opportunism and pragmatism were important characteristics of Stalin's view of the world; although it was difficult to make assumptions about Stalin's motivations.²³³ The occupation of the Red Army of vast

²²⁶ Garson, 'American Foreign Policy'; J. Nijman, 'The Limits of Superpower: The United States and the Soviet Union since World War II' *AAAG* 82 (4) (1992), pp. 681-695.

²²⁷ Raack, 'Stalin's Plans'; R.H. Wagner, 'The Decision to divide Germany and the Origins of the Cold War' *ISQ*, 24 (2) (1980), pp. 155-190; Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War*, p. 267; Alan Bullock argued, in contrast, that the division of Germany may have stabilised Europe, *The Lives and Times of Ernest Bevin* (OUP, Oxford, 1983), p. 29.

²²⁸ R. Birt, 'Personality and Foreign Policy: The Case of Stalin' *PS* 14 (4) (1993), pp. 607-625, Birt here argued a strong case for taking Stalin's paranoia into account when assessing his actions; Stalin's foreign policy has been referred to as 'imperial Communism', R.C. Tucker, 'The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy' *SR* 36 (4) (1977), pp. 563-589.

²²⁹ C. Keeble, 'The Roots of Soviet Foreign Policy' *IA* 60 (4) (1984), pp. 561-578; Hoffmann argued that Stalin's ideas did have enough flexibility to be adjusted according to his needs, Hoffmann, 'Soviet Foreign Policy Aims'; Conquest, *Present Danger*, pp. 17ff; Adomeit, 'Soviet Ideology'; Roberts, *The Soviet Union*, p. 16.

²³⁰ Noguee & Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 86.

²³¹ Some argue that Stalin was bent on world domination, J.M. Mackintosh, *Strategy and Tactics of Soviet Foreign Policy* (OUP, London, 1962), p.17; H. Hanak, *Soviet Foreign Policy since the Death of Stalin* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1972), p. 1; Daniel Yergin argues that Soviet territorial demands were indicative of expansionist motives, *Shattered Peace* (Deutsch, London, 1978), p. 118; Roberts, 'Stalin and Soviet Foreign Policy', ch. 2; Saunders called Stalin's policy 'defensive expansionism', *Losing an Empire*, p. 54.

²³² Judt, *Postwar*, pp. 49ff; M. Pittaway, *Eastern Europe 1939-2000* (Arnold, London, 2004), ch. 2, 3; Nigel and Geoffrey Swain argued that many saw Communism as a 'liberating ideology', *Eastern Europe since 1945* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1998), p. 8.

²³³ Conquest, *Present Danger*, p. 9 and 13; Taubmann, *Stalin's American Policy*, p. 131.

stretches of Eastern and South Eastern Europe established and cemented Soviet political influence while showing off its main instrument, apart from national or imported Communist leaders, of maintaining and solidifying that influence.

The Soviet post-war concept of peaceful co-existence was as much a real hope as a shrewd tactic to soothe the Western leader's anxieties and retard Western consolidation in Europe and in NATO. Propaganda became a favourite method for promoting it and other Soviet policies. When the Kremlin during the summer of 1947 decided that neither the Soviet Union nor any other Soviet bloc country would participate in the Marshall Plan and East-West relations took a turn for the worse as a result, not even propaganda could persuasively explain the motives behind this decision. This rejection, for various reasons, of economic aid that would undoubtedly have benefited the bloc and also would have bought time to sort out Europe's political post-war problems, was the first decisive step towards a separate future.²³⁴ Peaceful co-existence after that (discussed in chapter seven) was seen in the Foreign Office as a diversion not a real offer of cooperation.

²³⁴ Roberts, 'Moscow and the Marshall Plan'; Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, pp. 309-317.

Chapter Three: ND input into FO policy, 1945-1947

The last thing one would wish to suggest is that we should fail to endorse Lippman's thesis of the need to equate diplomacy with power; nevertheless diplomacy has its place.

Carcoe in a letter to the Northern Department, 10.9.1945²³⁵

3.1. Taking stock

After the cessation of hostilities and the end of Allied conferences it fell to the Foreign Office to deal with the outstanding issues.²³⁶ The large presence of various armies across Europe, the huge numbers of refugees still crossing borders and no clear ideas when the peace treaties would be signed left no choice but to try to assess options and start negotiations as soon as possible. Since the list of these issues was extensive, possible points for future friction were numerous. Although Europe was not completely pacified by the time of the German surrender in May 1945, options to use military force were very limited. In addition, already during the war it had become clear that Soviet diplomacy was unlike any other. Facing forceful, uncompromising and volatile opponents who increasingly operated from a strong perception of British weakness and Soviet strength, British diplomats took time to take stock and adjust.

Trying to sum up the problems so far to see what the more immediate implications for British foreign relations might be and to refocus Foreign Office staff for the upcoming Potsdam conference, Orme Sargent, then superintending Under-Secretary of the Northern Department, produced the first comprehensive Foreign Office assessment of British interests after World War II: 'Stocktaking after VE Day.'²³⁷ Soviet military occupation of Eastern Europe, now a reality, was not surprisingly a major problem; rival influences there,

²³⁵ FO371/47856-N13263/18/18.

²³⁶ For wartime reports see, for example, FO371/47860-N678/20/G38, JISC report 'Russia's strategic interests and intentions from the point of view of her security', 18.12.1944; FO371/47860-N4101/20/G38, Bruce Lockhart, 'Russia's future intentions', 11.4.1945.

²³⁷ 'Stocktaking after VE day', 11.7.45 in G. Ross, *The FO and the Kremlin: British Documents on Anglo-Soviet Relations* (CUP, Cambridge, 1984), pp. 210-217 or in FO371/50912; Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World', pp. 226ff; Zameitica, 'Three Letters to Bevin', pp. 53ff, Zameitica here pointed out the differences in opinion between the Foreign Office and the Moscow Embassy with regards to this assessment.

as Ross has argued, were not going to be tolerated.²³⁸ To make matters worse ‘this time control is to a large degree in the hands of the Soviet Union and the USA, and neither of them is likely to consider British interests overmuch if they interfere with their own and unless we assert ourselves.’ Effective foreign political influence would be difficult to achieve and continued Great Power cooperation, very much favoured by Sargent, was not a certainty. Realising that strength was vital in international relations where Britain needed to be a Great Power to secure her aims, he frankly demanded that ‘it is this misconception [that Britain is now a secondary power] which it must be our policy to combat.’ The trump cards to achieve this, although valid in themselves, were somewhat vague: ‘our political maturity, our diplomatic experience, the confidence which the solidarity of our democratic institutions inspires in Western Europe, and our incomparable war record’; no word here of hard political, military or economic facts. To face up to these and incorporate them into actual political planning in the Foreign Office took a little longer.

As it turned out Sargent was right: British experience in world affairs coupled with her enhanced role in Western Europe and her persistent defence of Social Democracy against Communism would help retain her role as a Great Power. The problem was that a Great Power was not a Super Power. Sargent did recognise without a doubt that Britain would sit at the top of the table only through her collaboration with other Western/European powers and the Dominions. Nevertheless, however difficult it was to make sense of Britain’s changed role, Sargent was quite clear on the role of the Soviet Union. Military preponderance in Eastern Europe meant that she would strive to secure her territorial gains and her border. He advanced the idea of an ‘ideological Lebensraum’ which Stalin might create to satisfy this need for security but did not go into a detailed discussion about what this may look like. The overlap in British and Soviet strategic interests was obvious: Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia, Germany, Italy, Greece and Turkey according to him had to be defended as British interests; this overlap becomes a more pronounced problem by 1950 and it discussed in more detail in Chapter Fourteen. The Soviet government had, not surprisingly, made their interest in most of these very clear. As a result, the choice of potential areas of conflict was extensive and any opportunity to settle conflicts had to be made the most of.

²³⁸ Ross, ‘Foreign Office Attitudes’, p. 534.

The British followed a dual strategy: safety and influence through negotiation and political consolidation. It thus became ever more important for the British to find reliable foreign policy partners, secure continued US presence in Europe and focus on the formation of a strong British foreign policy doctrine. A new doctrine, although difficult to agree on in the absence of clear foreign policy statements from either the US or the Soviet Union and while lacking good information and intelligence from Washington and Moscow, would give British foreign policy stability and a new confidence.²³⁹ This would enable the British to ignore the frequent Soviet provocations and react confidently to the numerous changes in Soviet tactics: the ongoing Conferences of Foreign Ministers, for example, were not only opportunities for settling disputes but also quite good opportunities to rattle an opponent. Facing these problems the mood in the Northern Department did occasionally dip very low.

The Russia Committee bluntly noted in December 1946 that ‘our present difficulties with the Soviet Union are indeed not due to our not facing up to fundamental problems...but rather to our having to face up to so many fundamental problems at once.’²⁴⁰ The absence of further high-level talks after Potsdam made it very difficult for the British to accurately gauge Britain’s place in the new world order where issues of cooperation, dependence and independence still had to be clarified and where the Soviet Union and her intentions were still being evaluated. This assessment followed a predictable course and reflected first wartime and then peacetime experiences and realities. During the war the closest contact between the two countries had been through their leaders, their military and occasionally intelligence representatives. After the German surrender this changed back to a more traditional diplomacy thus making the diplomats once again the main point of contact. Predominantly military issues (strategic, technological and financial), but also general issues of post-war collective security and responsibility, were replaced by detailed discussions about political, economic and social matters; so that by the end of the war not only the points of contact but also the objectives had changed. As a result of this, reports on reflections of wartime experiences were followed by assumptions and predictions of peacetime diplomacy. Reactions to peacetime diplomacy were followed by increasingly detailed strategy proposals.

²³⁹ FO371/56887-N6004/5169/G38, RC, 12.12.1946.

²⁴⁰ FO371/56887-N15843/5169/G38, RC, 10.12.1946.

Diplomacy continued to drag its heels. Military victory had immediately reduced the need for political concessions. The Conference of Foreign Ministers in London in September 1945, charged with working out the peace treaties, was a case in point. Both Byrnes and Molotov, overly confident, overplayed their hand and Britain was unable to influence the other two. However, this was also a new experience for the Kremlin. The war was over and the Kremlin now had to get used to being in the minority on issues of dispute. The resulting frequent changes in Soviet tactics became a fertile ground for analysis and an obsession for the Northern Department's staff. By early 1947 papers started to appear on Soviet tactics worldwide which were intended to assist Foreign Office diplomats in London and around the world in dealing with their Soviet counterparts.²⁴¹ It was important but difficult for the British to determine whether the behaviour of Soviet diplomats was based on short-term tactical issues or on a more long-term strategy.²⁴² One idea was that Molotov expected the Labour government to be more 'accommodating ...than its predecessors.'²⁴³ This issue would not be resolved until the following year when the Foreign Office had looked very closely at Soviet ideology and her behaviour so far to state confidently that although tactics would change, in fact most of Soviet post-war behaviour, possibly excluding Germany, was now based upon a firm long-term strategy. Whatever the answer to the question of tactics and strategies, the existence of definite spheres of influence was now a reality.²⁴⁴

Soviet tactics at the Conferences of Foreign Ministers displayed an acute awareness that these were opportunities to be exploited. Soviet unscrupulousness could not be misunderstood: as Pierson Dixon wrote in a top secret memorandum at the end of September: 'the opportunity will not recur without war.'²⁴⁵ Pointing out that the stakes were high and that all were aware of it, he went on to say that 'the Russians have applied them [characteristic Soviet bargaining tactics] much more obstinately here, because the issues at stake in the present conference are much more vital than those in the war-time conferences.' This was an indirect admission that war-time diplomacy had missed vital opportunities to settle disputes. But in the end he too put his faith in the hope that Russia

²⁴¹ FO371/66294-7840, 24.1.1947.

²⁴² FO371/47856-N13432/18/38, Warner, 3.10.1945; FO371/56885-N6274/5169/38, RC, 10.5.1946; FO371/66371-N10159/271/38, RC, 20.8.1947.

²⁴³ FO371/47856-N13101/18/38, Dixon, 2.10.1945.

²⁴⁴ The RC discussed the split in Europe many times, FO371/66362-N837/271/G38, 21.1.1947; FO371/66371-N8811/271/G38, 28.7.1947; FO371/66371-N9549/271/G38, 16.8.1947; FO371/66372-N12137/271/G38, 22.10.1947.

²⁴⁵ FO371/47861-N13101/20/G38, FO, 24.9.1945.

was economically weakened and therefore dependent, just like Britain, on US financial aid. This point, though discussed many times over the next months, was only resolved when in July 1947 the Soviet Union and the Eastern European states withdrew from the negotiations for the ERP.

Apart from military and territorial issues, it was the idea of a Western Bloc which played its part in derailing the discussion about the peace treaties.²⁴⁶ Although only in a very early discussion stage on the British side, the overall concept was clearly seen as plausible and implementable enough by the Soviet side to be treated from the start as a viable future threat to Soviet interests in Europe. As any bloc that excluded the Soviet Union was seen as an aggressive gesture, Britain, perceived to be pursuing just that, had in Soviet eyes become hostile to the Soviet Union. The outlook for future diplomatic negotiations was therefore bleak. Furthermore, the atomic bomb had made international relations even more complicated. The toughness of Soviet diplomacy particularly at the CFM in London in September was a direct result of this. In the absence of possession of the bomb itself but with enough confidence that it would not be used against her, concession from the Soviet side were not granted. The white flag offered by Byrnes at the next CFM in Moscow in December that year was thus duly exploited.²⁴⁷ However, it was clear that the Soviet Union had to be shown the limits of British concessions, otherwise the position of Britain would be possibly permanently damaged as concessions were regarded by the Soviet Union as weakness and as something to be exploited. At that time the US and Britain were not yet following the same principles of in dealing with the Soviet Union and the unhappy grumblings in the Northern Department about this were getting louder.

The failure of this conference was the first serious post-war international setback and had huge repercussions.²⁴⁸ Without the peace treaties, Europe could not leave the war behind. Without the peace treaties diplomatic relations and negotiations, particularly with the former aggressor states, would be difficult. Moreover, as John Galsworthy pointed out soon afterwards: 'since Russian suspicions can only be banished by the acceptance of Russia's views and demands, the harbouring of suspicions – both artificial and genuine –

²⁴⁶ FO371/47856-N13432/18G38, Roberts letter, 28.9.1945; FO371/66373-N12755/271/G38, RC, 4.11.1947.

²⁴⁷ For this conference see Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, pp. 32ff., Barker argued that Bevin, just like Churchill in 1944, was seeking a sphere of influence agreement with Stalin, particularly with regards to the Middle East and the Mediterranean.

²⁴⁸ See, for example, FO371/47856-N13432/18/G38, Warner minute, 6.10.1945.

becomes a profitable policy for the Soviet Government.'²⁴⁹ Diplomatic recognition of the Soviet imposed Romanian and Hungarian regimes had proven completely unacceptable to the US, even if not to Britain. However, if Britain and the US were left dissatisfied with the outcome of the conference, so was the Soviet Union. This conference had shown quite clearly that without concessions on all sides there was no progress.

Roberts pointed out the implications.²⁵⁰ The Soviets 'have been consciously reducing the tension. It looks as though they want to resume discussions which they had not expected to break down so completely.' However, he went on to say that

the US chargé d'affaires agrees with me that the Soviet government regard this as an important test case of Anglo-Saxon firmness and that they are confidently expecting us to weaken first in which event it will not be necessary for them to make any attempt to meet us half way.

In other words, Britain found itself between a rock and a hard place. To secure US acquiescence with regards to British territorial interests at that time proved extremely difficult. To obtain concessions from the Soviet Union was near impossible.

The Middle East, for example, particularly with regards to Persia where the Anglo-Soviet-Persian Treaty was about to run out, was an area of major Allied antagonism at that time.²⁵¹ Any talk about interests there which would have to be negotiated with the Soviet Union on a bilateral basis, would alarm the Americans who were violently opposed to a return to the old balance of power thinking.²⁵² Britain, the Foreign Office knew, had little to give to the Kremlin at that time. Roberts' had commented on this issue in an earlier telegram where he noted that 'Stalin's attitude [with the US congressmen] was that Britain and the Soviet Union had little to give each other at present, whereas Soviet-American

²⁴⁹ FO371/47939-N17024/1508/38, 16.12.1945; FO371/47856-N13432/18/38, Roberts, 28.9.1945.

²⁵⁰ FO371/47870-N14132/78/38, 8.10.1945.

²⁵¹ Greenwood argues that Stalin was intentionally pressing his demands to the point of resistance, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 39; for British policy in the Middle East see Zametica and Aldrich, 'The Rise and Decline of a Strategic Concept: The Middle East, 1945-51' in Aldrich, *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War, 1945-51*, pp.236-274.

²⁵² FO371/47858-N16807/18/38, FO, 27.11.1945.

relations were all-important.’²⁵³ The ongoing Foreign Office debate about the idea to just state British interests and ask the Soviets to state theirs could in these circumstances go nowhere. The main loser in this instance, of course, would be Britain as ‘there was a growing danger that if the present international deadlock remained unbroken, we, rather than the Americans, would be the main sufferers from any Soviet tendency to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy.’²⁵⁴ One could not ask for a more open statement of the dependence of Britain on the whims of the two new superpowers. Face to face talks which may have been useful to settle disagreements were by now extremely rare and even then Stalin did not respond well to prodding from others. By October 1945 Allied relations, as Warner quite openly stated, had entered a ‘stalemate.’²⁵⁵ This situation tested all sides and in the absence of any means to force an agreement it benefited those who could afford to wait. Waiting, of course, carried its own risks, particularly for the West.

Russia’s economic interests in Eastern Europe had become an ever greater worry to the Foreign Office as ‘the political means they employed to establish a stranglehold on Eastern Europe ...keep us and the Americans out.’²⁵⁶ Warner suggested that rather than addressing individual issues the whole of Soviet policy there should be tackled, preferably in cooperation with the US, thus forcing the Soviet Union to lay their cards in the table. To this effect he attached a memorandum entitled ‘The effect of Russian influence in Eastern Europe on the European economy.’²⁵⁷ The implications in it were clear. To seal off Eastern Europe politically was one issue, to refuse or minimise economic interaction was plainly dangerous; particularly if the country ‘in charge’ was a socialist planned economy with a poor economic track record and no interest in affluence for its people. Markets were vitally important to European recovery, as Britain well knew, and (Eastern) Europe as the nearest could not be given up without a fight. The US surely understood, Warner thought, and would support that argument even if they required some nudging. Overall, Britain had to become much more proactive. Changing policy, adopted since the CFM in London, the Foreign Office decided to implement ‘a reversal of our present policy of leaving the Russians alone and leaving it to the Americans to take the initiative.’²⁵⁸

²⁵³ FO371/47856-N13432/18/38, Roberts, 28.9.1945.

²⁵⁴ FO371/47858-N16807/18/38, Roberts to Warner, 27.1.1945.

²⁵⁵ FO371/47857-N15085/18/38, Warner to Cadogan, 25.10.1945.

²⁵⁶ FO371/47857-N15085/18/38, Warner to Cadogan, 25.10.1945.

²⁵⁷ FO371/47857-N15085/18/38, undated FO paper.

²⁵⁸ FO371/47857-N15321/18/38, 27.10.1945.

3.2. Discussing options and policies

The Northern Department knew that without a strong partner in Europe, and being dependent on US financial aid, Britain did not have a choice but to look West. It had become clear that military and economic strength would effectively dictate diplomacy but without accurate information about economic problems or potentialities on all sides, strategy recommendations were difficult to make. Up to a certain point Britain had to wait and see how the US and the Soviet Union would behave and where their declared interests and allegiances would lie.²⁵⁹ In the meantime, as much as Bevin tried to put forward a case for continued British independence in cooperation with the US, it had become clear that present British diplomatic weight had decreased rather dramatically.

In 1946 Kennan and Roberts wrote their famous despatches kick-starting a serious debate about a new foreign policy doctrine and new organisational structures for dealing with the Soviet Union on both sides of the Atlantic; Churchill gave his Fulton speech, Warner wrote his famous memorandum, the Russia Committee was established, new British and American ambassadors arrived in Moscow, the CFM met four times and an invitation to the Supreme Soviet for the visit of a Soviet delegation to the UK had been accepted. More movement within the Foreign Office and international politics offered a better chance to analyse the international situation more precisely in order to establish a baseline for a more effective foreign policy. There was just one problem. Although there were numerous departments, there was still nothing like a political intelligence department. The Russia Committee, established in March 1946, was an attempt to partly rectify this situation. However, it was a committee, not a department and met only weekly, later even only fortnightly. And since all Deputy and Assistant Under-Secretaries attended, along with representatives from the Ministry of Defence and the Chiefs of Staff, the Treasury and the BBC's Foreign Service, membership varied. As an advisory body its task was to assess information, recommend strategies and help implement those sanctioned by the Foreign Secretary and the Cabinet. To counter the 'Soviet attack and the offensive of militant Communism' was expected to use a large percentage of the Foreign Office's resources. But it had no permanent staff, no independent financial means and was not closely linked to non-Foreign Office departments and organisations. Being an extra-parliamentary committee, it could also not pressure the Foreign Secretary to adopt certain

²⁵⁹ The RC pointed out several times how vital close relations to the USA were for Britain, FO371/56885-N5170/5169/G38, 9.4.1946 and FO371/66362-N1183/271/G38, 27.11.1947.

recommendations. As a result, its overall impact arguably remained well below its actual potential even though its achievements are undeniable.²⁶⁰

January and February 1946 was an important time for the Northern Department. The election campaign to the Supreme Soviet was in full swing and while there was a lot of emphasis on domestic issues, foreign policy issues were never far away. The election speeches were generally very ambivalent. All leaders including Stalin made comments containing thinly veiled warnings about Soviet capabilities if not intentions. The main arguments used were not new. However, this time these points were made by the Soviet leaders themselves, thereby lending much more authority to these statements. Essentially the attack upon the West was three-pronged: against Britain as an exploitative imperialist power and an inadequate social democracy, against capitalist countries in general for having caused the war and for being likely to do so again, and by presenting the Soviet Union as a country fully capable of defending herself in the future against any aggressor. Roberts stated not for the first time that 'Soviet propagandists seem unable to boost their own achievements without the help of a foreign bogey.'²⁶¹

Although there were intermittent comments about the desirability of continued allied cooperation, an atmosphere of tension was clearly discernable and clearly desired by the Kremlin. It is no coincidence that international politics at the time were particularly difficult. The Soviet Union was obviously testing the ground and so confirmed what Brimelow had stated in February: 'there is no balance of power in Europe.'²⁶² The continued role of the US in Europe was still in doubt while Soviet intentions in Europe were now becoming clearer. The peace treaties with the former aggressor states had not yet been signed and the new world organisation, being based in the US, left Europe without its own framework for dealing with European matters. In the absence of war the overt threat of military intervention could not safely be used and that left only diplomacy to deal with a very complex situation. However, political uncertainty could influence diplomatic reality. Uncertainty in the West potentially also meant uncertainty in the Soviet Union:

²⁶⁰ FO371/56885-N6274/5169/G38, FO, 10.5.1946.

²⁶¹ FO371/56780-N1965/140/38, Roberts, 12.2.1946.

²⁶² FO371/56780-N1965/140/G38; Keeble argued that the Kremlin tested British responses to the new world order, *Britain and the Soviet Union*, p. 209.

the Russians fear the Americans much more than they fear us, which perhaps makes them all the more eager to avoid provoking them too far...on the other hand the Russians, in contrast to the Americans, still seem to regard us as a great world empire and are in no danger of under-rating us as a small island on the edge of Europe,

Roberts' here echoed Sargent's sentiments from July.²⁶³ Whether or not this was actually true did not really matter. Diplomatic strategies on all sides, in the absence of hard facts, were based on assumptions and occasionally wishful thinking.

Much of the discussion in the Northern Department during that year continued to be based on Soviet foreign policy and how to deal with it. As regards detailed information about the country itself, the gaps in knowledge remained extensive: 'we are here at present so completely cut off from contact with what happens outside Moscow that it is perhaps a mistake not to seize any opportunities that offer themselves for extending the scope of our knowledge', Clark Kerr wrote in September 1945.²⁶⁴ The Northern Department did not have much choice but to base their assessment of the Soviet Union and her intentions on readily available information: mainly the Soviet press and Soviet behaviour in international politics, particularly at the UN and the various CFMs, Soviet foreign policy itself and on any other information the Moscow embassy could provide. In May 1946 this issue was addressed at a JIC meeting: 'the unanimous opinion of the committee was...that our sources of information inside Russia were so few that it was in our interests, so far as intelligence is concerned, to do our outmost in every way.'²⁶⁵

One event possibly more than any other illustrated in 1946 how much of a threat the Soviet Union/ Communism was becoming. In February of 1946 a diplomatic bomb of sorts exploded. The Canadian authorities had made it public that they were investigating a case of Soviet espionage.²⁶⁶ The Soviet Embassy in Ottawa had undoubtedly been the centre of a spy ring and the Soviet authorities had admitted responsibility. In June 1946 the report

²⁶³ FO371/56763-N405/97/38, Roberts to Warner, 28.12.1945.

²⁶⁴ FO371/47858-N17222/18/38, 5.9.1945; a problem that continued, FO371/66373-N12959/271/38, Hankey, 8.11.1947.

²⁶⁵ FO371/56878-N6240/3858/G38, Caccia comment, 9.5.1946.

²⁶⁶ On the Gouzenko case and its implications see Hennessy, *The Secret State*, pp. 84ff.

was published.²⁶⁷ It revealed a sophisticated Fifth Column network which had recruited and trained highly educated Canadians, and some British nationals. This case proved especially damaging with regards to atomic and military matters. Reports on atomic research as well as advanced information about radar, anti-submarine devices, explosives etc. had been handed to the Russians; information that detailed research developments 'which would play an important part in the post-war defences of Canada, the UK and the US.' For Britain this was particularly serious. Not only had a possible military advantage been lost, but the much desired idea of a continued information exchange about atomic research suffered another serious setback.

Churchill's Fulton speech on March 5th, 1946 did nothing to relieve the international tension.²⁶⁸ His concentration on the 'two giant marauders, war and tyranny' and his linking of them to the ideas of democracy, collective security and communism essentially addressed all the points that had caused concern. To state that 'a shadow has fallen upon the scenes so lately lightened by the allied victory' was more than an understatement. The furore this speech caused everywhere came as no surprise and Stalin's response was predictable. Asked by a Pravda correspondent how he assessed Churchill's speech he stated 'I appraise it as a dangerous act calculated to sow the seeds of discord between the allied states and hamper their collaboration.'²⁶⁹ As usual he deliberately underplayed the friction between the allies and refused to take any responsibility for it. The article went on to say that 'it should be noted in this respect that Mr. Churchill and his friends strikingly resemble Hitler and his friends.' That Churchill had not been authorised by the British government to make this speech and was therefore not speaking for them did not matter. However, having used the threat of war extensively in Soviet domestic propaganda throughout the year, Stalin was eventually forced to grant interviews to several western journalists to calm the waves of a serious war hysteria that had engulfed the Soviet Union.²⁷⁰

The heated public debate which followed Churchill's speech possibly allowed the Northern Department to voice its concerns and ideas more outspokenly. For the US, Kennan had

²⁶⁷ See FO371/56912 for the details of the Canadian Royal Commission's findings, the so-called Blue Book, the report was published 27.6.1946.

²⁶⁸ See also Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War*, ch. 14.

²⁶⁹ FO371/56782-N4171/140/38, Pravda article, 16.3.1946; in fact the Kremlin was caught by surprise by Churchill's outburst, Zametica, 'Three Letters to Bevin', p. 69.

²⁷⁰ See, for example, FO371/66380-N11323/343/38, Hankey note, 8.10.1947.

already started this reorientation about the Soviet Union in his Long Telegram of February 22nd, of which the Foreign Office was well aware of. This memorandum, which had made such a big impact on the State Department, caused less of a sensation in London; possibly British policy makers thought that they understood the Soviet Union and its political system better than the Americans and thus required less teaching on it.²⁷¹ Kennan's equivalent in the British embassy in Moscow was Frank Roberts, also charge de affaires while Clark Kerr had left and Peterson had not yet arrived. He and Kennan frequently socialised and exchanged ideas.²⁷² His famous three letters to Bevin were sent on March 14th, 17th and 18th 1946; often seen in the historiography as 'Britain's Long Telegram'.²⁷³ Essentially he was taking stock from his side of the Foreign Service.²⁷⁴

Dissecting the international situation after the end of World War II, Soviet history and its implications for her present and future foreign policy, and the situation of Britain, he made a series of suggestions. Not surprisingly certain points, already discussed within the Northern Department on previous occasions, arose again: the Soviet preoccupation with her national security, the role of ideology in her domestic and foreign policies, her problematic negotiating behaviour, the problems of distinguishing between Soviet short-term tactics and long-term strategies, and the changed roles of different countries within international society. As he wrote: 'instead of the old balance of power there now exists a UNO and the Big Three', just what this really meant was not yet clear. In February already a concerned Warner had written: 'I am afraid the Russians no longer remain faithful to the big three idea.'²⁷⁵ Robert's discussion on who really wielded power in the Soviet Union was somewhat inconclusive. What was presented in public may not have been a true reflection of power behind the scenes. Roberts's overall summary of the USSR though, was short and sharp:

²⁷¹ For a detailed discussion of Kennan's views, his position in the State Department vis-à-vis Dean Acheson in particular and his fall from favour see W.D. Miscamble, 'Rejected Architect and Master Builder: George Kennan, Dean Acheson and post-war Europe' *RP* 58 (3) (1996), pp. 437-468.

²⁷² Roberts, *Dealing with Dictators*, p. 90.

²⁷³ The letters are in FO371/56763; Zametica, 'Three Letters to Bevin', Zametica noted that Robert's was essentially arguing for containment with an acknowledgement of spheres of influence; Smith argued that it is wrong to overstate the importance of these telegrams, but according to him Warner had already made up his mind independently of Roberts, 'A Climate of Opinion', p. 636; Greenwood asserts that Roberts' letters were 'central documents of the early Cold War' in 'Frank Roberts and the 'Other' Long Telegram', p. 104.

²⁷⁴ Roberts later noted that he wrote the letters with Britain's declining power in mind, *Dealing with Dictators*, p. 108.

²⁷⁵ FO371/56780-N3040/140/38, 25.2.1946.

the USSR is ideologically and economically a closed community, controlled by a small handful of men, themselves cut off from the outside world, whose system of government is based upon an all-pervasive police system and the most widespread propaganda machine.

Months later he would add one more problem: 'we should always remember that the Soviet Union has an almost religious conviction of infallibility.'²⁷⁶ Moving on to strategy Roberts discerned six Soviet long-term objectives: to develop the Soviet Union into the most powerful country, to weaken capitalist or social democratic countries, to keep America and Britain apart, to support communism everywhere, to attack social democracy and to use propaganda to maximum effect. In response, Roberts suggested, Britain could do several things: 'the first essential is to treat the problem of Anglo-Soviet relations in the same way as major military problems were treated during the war.'²⁷⁷ That a man like Roberts should resort to such suggestions revealed a serious disaffection with Soviet diplomacy, a disappointment about the absence of sufficient progress and a lack of hope for future cooperation. Next, the public had to be educated and Britain to be portrayed as the leader of a free world based on the principles of social democracy, freedom and prosperity for all. On a more tactical basis he recommended that

we should base ourselves firmly on the principle of reciprocity ...this means that we must be strong and look strong...should always take account of Soviet susceptibilities and prestige. Above all we should never rattle the sabre and make it difficult for the Russians to climb down without loss of face.²⁷⁸

This, of course, severely restricted the choice of diplomatic manoeuvres the British could attempt, since the Russians were hypersensitive to all forms of overt criticism or pressure. Without the choice to do as they thought best, the British were never going to be in charge. This became quite clear at the CFM in Paris which took place in three long haggling sessions between April 25th and October 15th 1946.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ FO371/56763-N12214/-/38, 17.9.1946.

²⁷⁷ This view helped establish the Russia Committee; Greenwood, 'Frank Roberts and the 'Other' Long Telegram', p. 117.

²⁷⁸ Hankey minuted in February 1946 that 'firm reciprocity should be our motto. No give, no get', FO371/56780-N3039/140/38.

²⁷⁹ FO371/56885-N9543/5169/38, RC, 16.7.1946.

After numerous telegrams, letters and memoranda which had made the rounds in the Northern Department and the Foreign Office, it fell to Warner as superintending Under-Secretary to summarise and continue the discussion of Soviet intentions just before the Paris CFM was to take place. His memorandum on 'The Soviet campaign against this country and our response to it' was designed to push the Secretary of State more than possibly the Foreign Office itself into a more confident and decisive foreign policy.²⁸⁰ At one point, the Northern Department knew, Britain would have to make a definite choice between the need to move closer to the US and the still strong wish to find some accommodation with the Soviet Union. In the end it was arguably a choice that was made for Britain, rather than by her. It had become painfully clear that financial dependence entailed a certain foreign political dependence as well, particularly since Britain wanted closer relations with the US. Thus American opposition to some British ideas in Europe and the Middle East could not just be brushed away. The Soviet Union, of course, did not care about British desires at all as long as the threat of any serious retaliation was nearly non-existent. Warner in his attempt to dissect Soviet future domestic intentions settled on three: 'a return to the pure doctrine of Marx-Lenin-Stalinism, the intense concentration upon building up the industrial and military strength of the Soviet Union, and the revival of the bogey of external danger to the Soviet Union.'²⁸¹ The implication here was that only an internally strong Soviet Union could project strength outwards. So the Soviet government zealously returned to those methods that had guaranteed its survival so far. For the Foreign Office ideology long after Lockhart's initial suggestion now made it to the top of the agenda.

As Warner frankly continued 'we should be very unwise not to take the Russians at their word just as we should have been wise to take *Mein Kampf* at its face value.'²⁸² This statement was extraordinary. It not only admitted a serious failure in the assessment of Germany prior to World War II on the part of the government, if not the Foreign Office, but it also admitted that the Russians were indeed regarded as a serious threat whose nature had not yet been fully understood. In order to counter this threat effectively he demanded that 'the Foreign Office must claim a voice in these matters which before the war was often denied to it'; foreign policy would only be successful if the Foreign Office was allowed to return/remain at the heart of the foreign policy machine. Here he laid the ground work for

²⁸⁰ Attlee was not keen on this memorandum, Zametica, 'Three Letters to Bevin', p. 87.

²⁸¹ Warner's memorandum is in FO371/56832-N6344/605/G38.

²⁸² Roberts agreed that the role of Marxist orthodoxy had been under-estimated, FO371/47854-N8096/18/38, 30.4.1945.

an increased Foreign Office influence across the board. The Russia Committee was to be based in the Foreign Office and senior Foreign Office staff continued to attend a range of extra-Foreign Office committees.²⁸³ The Foreign Office essentially asserted its position above that of the Ministry of Defence, which still held considerable influence in the government. Soviet actions could not be countered with overt military initiatives on a wider scale anymore leaving only diplomacy to deal with problems and thus confirming the renewed primacy of the Foreign Office.

According to Warner Soviet strategy appeared to target several points: that Russia would try to obtain her objectives through all methods short of war, that her present foreign policy was likely to be based on long-term plans and that it was aggressive and threatening to British interest worldwide, that one aim was to weaken Britain as much as possible, that this behaviour was likely to continue for a long time and that Soviet policies in different areas would be coordinated. In order to defend Britain he advocated the adoption of a 'defensive-offensive policy.' This made him the first to suggest an actual strategy that could be adapted to be used in different areas. This new policy was needed to counter the three main Soviet foreign political initiatives: to install communist or friendly governments wherever she could, to divide the countries opposed to her and to weaken Britain. The implementation of a 'worldwide anti-communist campaign' however, required apart from a sanction of this by the Cabinet, American acquiescence which would be very difficult to obtain.²⁸⁴ The US had still not declared her future intentions in Europe and viewed any suggestions by Britain to 'gang up' on the Soviet Union with suspicion, while Britain could not afford and did not want to alienate her wartime ally.²⁸⁵ In any case, propaganda matters were incredibly difficult to deal with: Should campaigns be anti-Soviet or anti-communist? How should people be addressed who were already used to an aggressive propaganda? How to deal with local prejudices? The bottom line, though, was clear:

²⁸³ The Russia Committee was established after another memorandum by Ivone Kirkpatrick assessing its potential usefulness and needs, Smith, 'A Climate of Opinion', pp. 640ff; Zametica argued that April, 2nd, the day the Russia Committee met for the first time, was the beginning of Britain's Cold War, Zametica, 'Three Letters to Bevin', p. 87; Keeble noted that this committee was only re-established, having been formed originally in 1918, *Britain and the Soviet Union*, p. 214; see also Merrick, 'The Russia Committee', pp. 453-468.

²⁸⁴ This was something the Soviet Union was well aware of, FO371/56786- N9816/140/G38, Balfour, Washington, 24.7.1946.

²⁸⁵ British efforts to persuade American political and public opinion are detailed in C. Anstrey, 'The Projection of British Socialism: Foreign Office Publicity and American Opinion, 1945-50' *JCH* 19 (3) (1984), pp. 417-451; P. Taylor, 'The Projection of Britain Abroad, 1945-51' in Dockrill & Young, *British Foreign Policy*, pp. 9-30.

the interests of this country and the true democratic principles for which we stand are directly threatened. The Soviet government makes coordinated use of military, economic and political weapons and also of the communist 'religion' ...we must at once organise and coordinate our defences against all these.

This in actual fact was a suggestion of a declaration of a new form of war.²⁸⁶ Although the Northern Department was generally in agreement, it took Bevin much longer to accept this as a basis for future policies with regards to the Soviet Union.²⁸⁷ In September Warner reminded the Northern Department that

we should not allow considerations of not irritating the Russians to influence us in the tactics adopted in specific mattersand not allow such considerations to deter...us from taking any action necessary to withstand Soviet political aggression and the spread or consolidation of Soviet and Communist influence... in the world. We should point out the damage of the doctrine of non-irritation leading initially to appeasement.²⁸⁸

Unfortunately, the Northern Department found it hard to persuade the Secretary of State of this and even in March 1947 Sargent still stated that 'a policy of 'defensive-offensive' against communism had never been authorised except with regards to the Middle East.'²⁸⁹ As much as Bevin was loved by his staff and proved an asset to the Foreign Office, he was not someone who liked to be prodded too much. He always made up his own mind but once that had been done he displayed a single-minded determination that proved often very effective.

Against Northern Department recommendations, the Secretary of State's desire for cooperation was still stronger than the will to look beyond it and consider the alternatives and this limited the options that could be used by Britain to achieve her aims. As long as this did not change, Britain could not re-assert her place as an independent great power. On the other hand, it was still unclear whether the Soviet Union was acting from a position of

²⁸⁶ Smith argued that the overall acceptance of Warner's and Kirkpatrick's views came with the formation of the IRD in late 1947, 'A Climate of Opinion', p. 646.

²⁸⁷ See Adamthwaite, 'Britain and the World', p. 228.

²⁸⁸ FO371/56790-N14169/140/38, Warner to Hankey, 17.10.1946.

²⁸⁹ FO371/66367-N4235/271/38, Sargent, 13.3.1947; FO371/56885-N6092/5169/38, the RC knew that any propaganda initiative had to be coupled to policy statements to be more effective, 7.5.1946.

strength or weakness. Weakness meant that it was unlikely that she would resort to military force, while strength meant unpredictability and was therefore the real worry. The JIC had concluded that the Soviet Union would not risk war in the next five years.²⁹⁰ This, however, was not really much comfort, particularly since there was ‘an inherent danger of a situation in which the Russians had to depend on their unaided judgement in deciding whether or not to carry through some foreign policy which might lead at once to a major war.’ This point was problematic not only for the British. On both sides of the Atlantic there was a pronounced fear that a new war might break out because of serious Soviet misjudgements. Since the end of the war the Soviet Union had been testing her power and influence along her perimeter, and in the new international organisations which, considering the length of her border, provided never-ending irritation for all.²⁹¹

In organisational terms it took time for the Northern Department attempted to get on top of dealing with Russia. There had been a debate about the usefulness of a committee dealing specifically with Russia as Roberts had suggested and the Russia Committee was established in March 1946 just before Robert’s despatch reached the Foreign Office. It met for the first time on April 2nd.²⁹² Brimelow’s point had been more than clear:

two people at the Russian desk [in the Northern Department] ...three people in the Russian section of FORD...rarely any hard thinking on what the Russians are up to and what we ought to do about it except when a JIC paper is on the stocks...there is no proper machinery for ensuring that decisions on topics which at first sight to no concern the Soviet Union are considered in advance from the standpoint of the opportunities they afford to communist inspired anti-British propaganda.

This was essentially an admission that the Foreign Office had to become more proactive and better organised. To anticipate Russian actions would be invaluable for effective diplomacy; shortly after discussions started about the need for ‘ideological reporting’ in

²⁹⁰ FO371/56832-N5572/605/38, memorandum of discussion to brief Peterson before going to Moscow, 18.3.1946.

²⁹¹ See, for example, FO371/56832-N5628/605/38, Roberts, 27.4.1946; FO371/56887-N14732/5169/G38, RC, 1.11.1946.

²⁹² Brimelow and Hankey were in favour with some reservations, Warner was not convinced, minutes in FO371/56763-N157/97/38.

order to expand the Foreign Office's knowledge base about Communism and its present forms and threats.²⁹³ Months later Hankey returned to this point when he wrote that

the Russians see almost everything in terms of their propaganda value for bludgeoning their enemies ... a counter attack might have a useful effect in making the Russians realise that their present methods may well be turned against them²⁹⁴;

just like Warner had suggested in April. Propaganda, of course, worked both ways. The near complete ignorance of the British public of the hostile Soviet propaganda campaign against Britain as well as Soviet behaviour worldwide was a major concern for the Northern Department.²⁹⁵ Just like the American so the British government had to wean their populations off the idea of the great wartime ally and persuade them that the Soviet Union had in fact become a serious threat. To deal with this and also to streamline information from Moscow, new guidelines were issued that refocused diplomatic reporting. The increase in the foreign political weight of the Soviet Union coupled with the relative stagnation in the number of staff both in the Northern Department and the Moscow embassy required some rethinking about how to make the best of available resources. The increased need to properly digest available information, in order to turn it into useful policy advice, intensified the pressure on the Northern Department. In the end, Bevin took his time to come round to the Northern Department's views and in the meantime this new system could be perfected.

Halfway through the third session of the Peace Conference in Paris, which took place between July 29th and October 15th 1946, and presumably exasperated by the very potent mix of stubbornness, aggressiveness and single-minded determination displayed by the Soviet delegation, Roberts moved closer to the admission that there were now two hostile camps; something the Foreign Office should finally acknowledge.²⁹⁶ Even though there had been increasing talk of opposing even hostile blocs, in reality two irreconcilable camps

²⁹³ FO371/56887-N14737/5169/G38, Radice, 19.10.1946; FO371/66362-N271/271/G38, FO minute, 12.12.1946; FO371/66362-N613/271/G38, RC, 15.1.1947; FO371/66365-N3237/271/G38, Sargent to Cooper, 11.3.1947.

²⁹⁴ FO371/56763-N12214/-/38, 17.9.1946.

²⁹⁵ On continued Northern Department concerns see, for example, FO371/66365-N2853/271/38, Warner, 25.2.1947.

²⁹⁶ FO371/56835-N11298/605/38, Roberts, 4.9.1946.

had existed for twenty years before the outbreak of World War II. Now, the underlying and particularly long-term motives of Soviet foreign policy were discussed as something like the Holy Grail of international diplomacy. For Roberts

the essential long-term explanation of Soviet conduct is that the Soviet Union is not simply another totalitarian dictatorship playing at power politics, but a unique and abnormal member of international society, whose policy is governed by dynamic ideological motives.

Here again he confirmed the primary importance of ideology. Worryingly for the Foreign Office he continued that ‘Soviet policy is...a constant offensive-defensive...and growing strength will only remove the chief check upon her actions i.e. the fear of consequences.’ Although he thought that some form of arrangement was possible, friction along the frontier between Capitalism and Communism would only increase. The expansion of the number of Communist states would only lengthen this frontier and the corresponding friction would thus intensify. Thomas Brimelow, much in favour of tougher action against the Soviet Union, spelt out the implications. The Soviet leaders ‘preach a doctrine of permanent hostility ...[and] the result of this hostility is a permanent risk of war.’²⁹⁷ The consequences for the Soviet Union were clear: the extension of the military-industrial complex in the Soviet Union, the tightening of internal control and the aggressive continuation of the search for an effective cordon sanitaire. In all but name this was an admission that the Cold War was a reality.

The diplomatic choices for Britain appeared slim: not to exacerbate the already existing problems and not to create new ones. The preferred strategy to Brimelow was clear: ‘we must have a basic, logical, coherent and sober doctrine that will be acceptable to men of common sense everywhere...the time has come when we must make up our minds on a political strategy.’ However, in the event neither Hankey nor Warner were completely convinced. They did not think that more could be done at the time or that some form of balance of power was unattainable.

²⁹⁷ FO371/56835-11298/605/38, Brimelow note, 4.9.1946.

By 1947 the Northern Department had battled its way through numerous discussions and memoranda and had arrived, though not unanimously, at a fairly firm conclusion. A new foreign policy doctrine was needed and it had to be firm yet flexible, without being overly alienating to opponents. The focus was on the US as the preferred and needed partner in international relations. The Soviet Union would undoubtedly have to be treated as a threat to British interests worldwide. More certainty also meant less discussion. Most had been won over by the new way of thinking and improved communications procedures within the Northern Department made analysis quicker and easier. The Russia Committee slowly sprung into action and arguably improved communication with other segments of the government. In the highly fragmented organisation of British governmental departments any close exchange of information though occasionally difficult to achieve was very valuable. To assess and counter the threat posed by the Soviet Union demanded nothing less. Information, as usual, proved to be the key. And the challenge to obtain what was needed kept the Moscow embassy extremely busy. Not for the first time there was a lack of suitable staff in London and Moscow. Although the Moscow embassy profited from a small increase in staff, the Northern Department essentially had to make do with those they had already got. The government drive to train Soviet specialists to work in various government posts only kicked in much later.

The focus of allied discontent had shifted and Germany was now recognised as a main battle ground. Animosity between the former allies had steadily increased making effective cooperation there impossible.²⁹⁸ The ACC and the EAC had both proven to be ineffective. The Bizone, created on January 1st, 1947, had been a result. For Germany the downward spiral continued until in October 1949 two Germanies were in existence. Elsewhere Greece, Turkey and Iran were also still unresolved issues.²⁹⁹ The Secretary of State here eventually made a decision that changed both Britain's and the US's role in the world. The Northern Department had long desired firm statements of intent, not only from others but also for Britain. On February 24th 1947 Bevin instructed Kerr, the ambassador to Washington, to inform the US State Department that Britain would withdraw from Greece

²⁹⁸ See, for example, FO371/66294-N1011/49/38.

²⁹⁹ Leffler, *Origins of the Cold War*, chapters 5, 6, 7.

on May 30th.³⁰⁰ Financial difficulties had made a continued British military presence there impossible. Greece proved crucial. The wartime goodwill towards the Soviet Union amongst the American public and politicians was disappearing fast and thus revealed new options in foreign relations. In the end, it was the final trigger that persuaded the US government to admit that the Soviet Union had become recognised as a big enough threat to US interests to warrant continued involvement in Europe. It, however, also proved again that US diplomacy was still more reactive than proactive when it came to a bigger scale. Only an admission of weakness by Britain persuaded the US to make her future intentions clear.

Meanwhile the violent propaganda campaign against Britain continued unabated while country after country in Eastern Europe fell under Soviet control. Having learned their lesson the hard way the previous year, however, the Russians were more careful in their behaviour so not to prejudice the CFM in Moscow in March/April 1947. They also possibly did not want to jeopardise the visit of the delegation of the Supreme Soviet which came to Britain in March 1947. Bevin played along. A draft speech for the Secretary of State by the Northern Department continued along the traditional line:

the formal foundations of our relations with the Soviet government is entirely satisfactory, namely our common membership of the UN and of the CFM, our belief in Great Power collaboration and unanimity and our Treaty of Alliance...I believe that we shall...continue to work for Four Power collaboration in the framework of the UNO.³⁰¹

As this draft did not reflect Northern Department beliefs and demands, it is safe to assume that it was written with instructions from the Secretary of State in mind. Although Bevin had admitted defeat over Greece, he had not yet accepted the futility of a policy towards the Soviet Union that was not based on a firm doctrine of reciprocity. He still held out some hope that things could still get done. And this illustrated one of the major problems of the Northern Department. Without a Secretary of State who agreed with the Northern

³⁰⁰ The background to this decision is still hotly debated, Robert Frazier noted that there is some but not much evidence to suggest that Bevin deliberately withdrew aid in order to pressure the USA back into the international arena, it was more likely that Bevin caved in to Dalton's pressure, 'Did Britain start the Cold War? Bevin and the Truman Doctrine' *HJ* 27 (3) (1984), p. 723 and 726; Judt, with regards to not only British but also European weakness, has argued that it was a problem and not an opportunity for the USA, *Postwar*, p. 95.

³⁰¹ FO371/66365-N3020/271/38, unsigned draft for Bevin speech, 22.2.1947.

Department and made their suggestions official British policy, there would be not much movement in foreign relations and certainly no emergence of a more determined and independent British foreign policy. It also did not help the Northern Department that the Secretary of State was equally determined to ignore the flood of anti-British propaganda in Moscow.³⁰²

Overall, this was not a promising background to the negotiations for a revised Anglo-Soviet Treaty which got underway in January of 1947 and led to heated arguments during the CFM in Moscow which started on March 10th.³⁰³ When Bevin had offered to extend the Treaty Stalin immediately took up the offer to start a discussion about a proper revision of it. Not surprisingly this was something the US felt ambivalent about, especially since Byrnes had already proposed a Four Power Treaty that would deal with Germany.³⁰⁴ George Marshall stated quite frankly that 'this policy [the Four Power Treaty] has the overwhelming support of our people who pin their faith to this rather than to the attempt to reach international security through bilateral agreements.'³⁰⁵ The US was obviously not amused and the Foreign Office promptly telegraphed back to confirm that closest Anglo-American cooperation was very much desired.³⁰⁶

The problem was that a proliferation of bilateral agreements would make the US idea of a Four Power Treaty unnecessary, while it could seriously harm the work of the UNO.³⁰⁷ The British, of course, suspected that Stalin had proposed to extend the new treaty precisely in order to bypass quadripartite agreements. In a confidential memorandum to Sargent Oliver Harvey voiced his suspicions: 'this bilateral obligation is precisely what the Soviets ...want, because they do not trust the quadripartite machinery to work promptly.'³⁰⁸ And not only that, as Sargent admitted in a letter to Duff Cooper

³⁰² FO371/66367-N4455/271/38, Dixon to Hankey, 15.4.1947.

³⁰³ RC meeting notes on the Treaty re-negotiations are in FO371/ 56887, 66365, 66368, 66371, 66373 and 66375; the original Treaty had been signed in London on May 26th, 1942 and was intended to protect against German aggression only; it did not bode well for the success of the negotiations that the Russians had removed the painting of the signing of the Treaty from the Soviet government guest house in June 1946, FO371/56785-N8319/140/38; also Keeble, *Britain and the Soviet Union*, p. 215.

³⁰⁴ Something the British COS supported, see FO371/66366-N3399/271/G38.

³⁰⁵ FO371/6363-N1631/271/38, Clark Kerr telegram, 31.1.1947; Acheson also voiced his concerns, FO371/66363-N1748/271/38.

³⁰⁶ FO371/66363-N1631/271/38, FO to Clark Kerr in Washington, 6.2.1947.

³⁰⁷ FO371/66365-N3196/271/38, Sargent to Bevin, 15.3.1947.

³⁰⁸ FO371/66364-N2046/271/G38, Harvey to Sargent, 3.2.1946.

while the Western Bloc as such has not yet materialised, it is, as you know, our policy that our affairs should be 'mixed up' more and more closely with those of France, Belgium and the Netherlands and we always have in view the possibility of closer association with all the other countries of Western Europe.³⁰⁹

As much as Britain needed US financial aid and her continued military presence in Europe, Britain did not trust US motives enough to rely on this support alone.

Apart from obvious geopolitical implications of having only the US as a major ally, it made sense to secure the protection of peace and of British interests from different points. The parts of the treaty dealing with German aggression had been in actual fact superseded by the establishment of the UNO. However, both parties had to acknowledge this, therefore both had to trust the UNO to be up to the job. Unfortunately the Soviets were not interested in putting their faith in the UNO, not surprisingly after the experiences with collective security in the 1930s, and demanded specific amendments and additions to the treaty.³¹⁰ As the British openly acknowledged, war was a fast event and whether the UNO was able to respond in an appropriate time frame was questionable. Also, the Grand Alliance in any meaningful military sense had ceased to exist in August 1945. For now Britain was still obliged on a bilateral basis to come to the assistance of the Soviet Union in the case of future German aggression for another twenty years. As a memorandum pointed out, this situation was far from desirable: 'we cannot wage war effectively without the Dominions and also America' and so an extension of bilateral obligations was not desired.³¹¹ Even out-with the treaty negotiations this was a surprisingly honest admission of British weakness at a time when international diplomacy was all about strength.

There was one more reason that made the British weary of extending this treaty without a change in the military provisos. The Foreign Office thought that the likelihood of a war between the US and the Soviet Union in the Far East, in which Germany might join the US, within the next fifty years was just as great as that of a war between the Soviet Union and Germany.³¹² In both cases Britain would under the existing treaty have to come to the

³⁰⁹ FO371/66365-N3237/271/G38, 17.3.1947.

³¹⁰ See FO371/66364, 66365, 66366, 66367, 66370.

³¹¹ FO371/66363-N1378/271/38, Hankey to Warner, 21.3.1947.

³¹² FO371/66367-N4274/271/38, Sargent to Bevin, 14.4.1947.

existence of the Soviet Union, overall a highly undesirable situation. In the end, the British wanted to delay the signing of a possible new Anglo-Soviet Treaty until it was clear where the Four Power Treaty would go. They saw it as highly undesirable to leave the CFM in Moscow with a new bilateral treaty with the Soviet Union while a multilateral agreement with the US had not also been signed.³¹³ The wrangling over these issues lasted several months and certainly did not enhance mutual good-will. The Soviets were increasingly exasperated with the British for their refusal to extend the military provisions of the Treaty, while the British could not persuade the Soviets to put their faith in the UNO. Negotiations never broke down, merely remained 'in progress.' That was something that could not be said for the last CFM in Moscow in London during November and December of 1947. Despite Bevin openly stating to Molotov that 'we had so many sessions that this was probably about the last chance of reaching agreement', the conference ended as usual in disagreement.³¹⁴

Looking back at the previous CFMs this was not particularly remarkable. More problematic was the fact that this was the last CFM for the time being. Losing this forum of discussion reduced the diplomatic contact between the one-time Allies even further. Germany, of course, remained the main issue on the table and disagreements far outweighed agreements. There were strong suspicions on the British side that the Soviet Union had been delaying effective agreements to consolidate their gains in Germany so far.³¹⁵ As Roberts put it 'the Russians never take 'half a loaf' until their have exhausted every means of getting the whole loaf.'³¹⁶ To get that 'half a loaf' however, proved increasingly difficult as cooperation between Britain and the US had improved considerably. Like the British, the Americans had gone through 'a lengthy series of disillusioning experiences to exhaust the great reserved fund of goodwill created during the war by the achievements of the Red Army.'³¹⁷ And just like the British they arrived at a similar conclusion. The new policy of 'patient firmness', the US version of the Foreign Office idea of 'firm reciprocity', was finally being implemented. President Truman and General Marshall had confirmed it in their speeches and American political and public opinion was lining up behind them. US continued interest in Europe and US financial aid were now much more likely to continue with the full approval of Congress, even though

³¹³ A point Clark Kerr confirmed in a telegram from Washington, FO371/66367-N4498/271/38, 16.4.1947.

³¹⁴ FO371/66483-N13522/13273/38, conversation, 24.11.1947.

³¹⁵ FO371/66379-N6323/343/38, Hankey, 11.6.1947.

³¹⁶ FO371/66379-N6323/343/38, Roberts to Hankey, 27.5.1947.

³¹⁷ FO371/ 66425-N10052/1380/38, Balfour from Washington to Bevin, 23.8.1947.

many Americans still struggled with the differences between Social Democracy and Communism, and may have longed for the old idea of retreating into isolation.

That the Soviet Union and her Eastern European satellites had withdrawn from the negotiations for the ERP in July came as no surprise and just compounded Western suspicions about future prospects. The British were also finding American demands connected to the ERP rather humiliating.³¹⁸ The term 'Cold War' slowly crept into diplomatic correspondence, although some presumed it a stage rather than a permanent problem.³¹⁹ For the Foreign Office and the Northern Department these developments came only partially as a surprise as periodic drives to ensure the ideological supremacy of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism had been a constant feature of Soviet domestic political life since 1917. Now however, with Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe and an expressed interest in other areas of Europe, the Middle and Far East, the export of this ideology and its methods became a major concern. Information and intelligence were increasingly perceived as vitally important: to back up political strategies, not only to aid negotiations but also to ensure the longevity of the eventual agreements; to find ways to counter this perceived threat to the Western political and social system; and to deal with issues of national security and future military planning in the Western countries. The integrity of the Soviet political system, the strength/potential of industry/agriculture and domestic content/discontent were important markers in establishing just how strong the muscle behind the Soviet face really was. But although the task was clear, the ways to get this information were extremely limited. In a totalitarian police state any sensitive information is tightly controlled and when released has to be regarded as having been manipulated.³²⁰ At the same time, those individuals with access to information are usually unwilling to volunteer it.

Roberts in his first full report since the German surrender wrote in late May 1945 that more confidence on the part of the Soviet Union led to bigger plans and a desire to play a bigger international role.³²¹ He clearly saw that as a result Britain was faced with limited options but thought that, even though the Soviet Union was unlikely to treat Britain with any special kindness with regard to her 'peculiar difficulties and embarrassments', she would

³¹⁸ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 51.

³¹⁹ FO371/66425-N10052/1380/38, Balfour from Washington, 23.8.1947.

³²⁰ See FO371/56758-N6961/76/38, FO paper, 24.5.1946.

³²¹ FO371/47923-N6582/627/38, Roberts to Eden, 24.5.1945.

not aim for a reduced British military or general world role. This of course was only part of the truth as increased intervention of both the US and the Soviet Union would necessarily alter the British role in the world. However, it took a while to see through declarations of intent and actual actions. Brimelow was undoubtedly right when he later commented that 'it is more important to watch what they do than what they say.'³²²

Despite attempts to maintain a workable relationship with the Soviet Union and despite huge efforts to understand this country, its history and ideology in detail it proved impossible to find a level on which to discuss pressing issues and reach agreements agreeable to both sides. Soviet post-war opportunism in Eastern Europe and her paranoia about her security as well as her undoubtedly strengthened international position led to a stagnating international diplomacy. Britain, economically and financially severely weakened, could not disguise her slipping international position; and, like Lippmann had argued, diplomacy without power could not really be effective. For Britain therefore realism and pragmatism, rather than confidence and opportunism, were the main cornerstones of her diplomacy. Until the USA was more firmly on Britain's side and until some Western integration was achieved in the Western Bloc and NATO her room to manoeuvre was limited.

The Northern Department led the discussion of possible policy initiatives. Staff realised very quickly that although Britain had lost its dominating position in world politics possibly for good, this newly found weakness could not be shown. Firmness towards the Kremlin, and within limits also towards the State Department, was necessary in order to maintain the remnants of its former power. As the international scene was shifting towards a real division between East and West, and as former colonial empires were suffering severe civil unrest and slowly broke up, Britain focused on Western Europe and the USA as future allies and sources of strength. Staff diligently analysed large amounts of information, and discussed and presented those future policies which in their opinion best supported Britain in this changed world. Dedicated and realistic they established the basis of the discussion during the early Cold War about how to deal with the Kremlin and how to ensure that this emerging conflict would not escalate into a new war.

³²² 'They' were the Soviets, FO371/47924-N9762/627/38, Brimelow note, 9.8.1945.

Part Three. Consolidation and Confrontation, 1948 to 1950

By the end of 1947, with all peace treaties but two signed and spheres of influence essentially entrenched, the need and will to cooperate virtually disappeared. Crises in Iran, Greece and Turkey had been dealt with; Germany and Austria were still occupied. War had been avoided although talk of it had increased over time. The next three years, however, were to see the first clash in Europe over Berlin, the first war in the Far East in Korea and the emergence of three new countries within or close to the Allied spheres of influence with the FRG, GDR, PRC (not including the successor states in the Far East). In this charged atmosphere both Britain and the Soviet Union acquired the atomic bomb thus breaking the American monopoly. The Northern Department, not surprisingly, found that the need for an accurate and speedy assessment of any available information regarding the Soviet Union had increased dramatically.

After a lot of stocktaking and the increasing experience of failure in international diplomacy to settle outstanding disputes, all sides moved towards a more thought through and determined approach. Political and military consolidation, and the pursuit of an effective domestic and international propaganda were now cornerstones of both Western and the Soviet policy. 1948 hailed a new post-war phase as British plans for increased Western European consolidation, which included Western German rearmament, elicited a severe Soviet response with the blockade of Berlin in June that year. Stalin's Peace Offensive and fairly low key negotiations allowed the Soviets to withdraw less than a year later but the Soviet tactic of using peace propaganda to maximum effect remained. The Peace Campaign had already penetrated the international press when the Korean War broke out in June 1950. The first post-war war, albeit not in Europe, hastened consolidation on both sides and further hardened the diplomatic front. A tactical mistake by the Kremlin allowed Western forces to fight in Korea thus bringing hostile armies very near the Soviet border. Like Greece, Korea had resulted in a more determined American response in an area it might not have otherwise have been interested in. Against this background it is not surprising that the Northern Department continued to push for a more determined and confident British foreign policy.

Chapter Four: Institutions and personnel: The FO, the ND, and the Moscow Embassy, 1948-1950

We...must go over to the offensive so that we do not have to lead from weakness.

Wallinger note, 10.5.1948³²³

The Northern Department in 1948 was well organised and included new as well as experienced officials. Charles Harold Bateman took over as superintending Under-Secretary of the department replacing Christopher Warner. Robin Hankey remained as Head of Department until 1950 when, after four years, Geoffrey Harrison succeeded him. All were supported at a higher level by Sargent, the Permanent Under-Secretary until February 1949 when William Strang took over. Strang himself had served in the Soviet Union between 1930 and 1933 and had thus valuable first hand experience of the country. Thomas Brimelow and A.E. Lambert, who had joined the Soviet desk of the Northern Department in 1946 and 1947 respectively, remained and ensured a much needed continuity of knowledge about Soviet affairs. C.R.A. Rae, who had entered the Foreign Office only in 1947 complemented their team at the Soviet Desk. In 1949, after Brimelow left for his new post in Havana, the thirty five year old J.Y. Mackenzie joined them.

In British Embassy in Moscow had been headed by Maurice Peterson since June 1946. On his retirement in June 1949 David Kelly took over until he in turn retired two years later. Both guided their embassy through difficult times. The number of staff had decreased between 1947 and 1948 from thirty four to twenty nine. In 1950 Kelly would preside over only twenty two staff. The deepening Cold War and the problematic situation in the British embassies in the Soviet orbit made it even more important to secure accurate information and a careful analysis for the Northern Department in London to work with.³²⁴ A significant change of staff in the embassy may have made this quite a challenge. Two well regarded specialists left: the first secretary Charles Bolsover and the embassy

³²³ FO371/71650-N5416/31/38, note on 'The Communist Campaign'.

³²⁴ For example, FO371/86747-NS1051/22, Treatment of Western diplomatic missions in the Soviet orbit, 13.3.1950.

counsellor/minister Frank Roberts. Bolsover went on to teach at a London University while Roberts took over from Pierson Dixon as Bevin's Principal Private Secretary. Only Roger Allen remained as first secretary. Nevertheless, very able new faces joined the embassy in these three years. Geoffrey Harrison arrived to serve in Moscow until 1950 when he returned to London to take over as head of the Northern Department, and William Barker, a Slavonic linguist who had worked at Bletchley Park during the war, became the head of the new Russian Secretariat.

To remain effective and on top of new developments and the resulting demands on the Foreign Office, new committees were formed and procedures changed.³²⁵ The Cold War sub-committee of the already well established Russia Committee was to facilitate a wide-ranging and accurate discussion of the new phase of post-war Anglo-Soviet relations.³²⁶ As part of the ongoing assessment of Foreign Office efficiency the Russia Committee itself was, not surprisingly, re-evaluated to ensure its proper function.³²⁷ At a higher level the Permanent Under-Secretary formed his own Committee with a view to discussing longer term policies while the Russia Committee was to remain the focal point for short term policy proposals.³²⁸ The Information Research Department (IRD) was set up in January 1948 to oversee the propaganda aspect of British foreign policy. Its importance for the Cold War fight against Communism, cannot, as Aldrich noted, be overstated.³²⁹ Being at the forefront of this fight back, the IRD, not surprisingly, soon found itself pressured by the COS to include covert operations in its portfolio.³³⁰ As British foreign and defence policies slowly narrowed, the COS not surprisingly gained a stronger foothold in Foreign Office

³²⁵ Especially after the spy scandal of the Cambridge Five, Kim Philby, Donald Mclean, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross, some of whom had held pivotal posts in the fight-back against Soviet Communism in London and Washington.

³²⁶ More information is in FO371/70272-W7836/7836/50; FO371/77615-N103/1051/38, meeting of the RC Cold War Sub-Committee, 4.1.1949; Aldrich, *British Intelligence*, p. 22.

³²⁷ FO371/71687-N12649/765/38, Revision of the Russia Committee, 22.11.1948; the discussion is also in FO371/77616 and FO371/77623; Adamswaite, 'Britain and the World', p. 235.

³²⁸ R. Ovendale, 'William Strang and the Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee' in Zametica, *British Officials*, pp. 212-228; Adamswaite, 'Britain and the World', pp. 228-231, Adamswaite here compared the PUSC to the US State Department's Policy Planning Staff; Ovendale had argued earlier that there were similarities in outlook between the two bodies, *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments*, p. 17.

³²⁹ Aldrich, *British Intelligence*, p. 20.

³³⁰ For more information on the IRD see the introduction to this thesis; also H. Wilford, *The IRD: Britain's secret Cold War Weapon revealed*, *RIS* 24 (3) (1998), p. 357; A. Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist propaganda, 1945-1953: The IRD* (Routledge, London, 2004).

committees. While the existence of British embassies in the Eastern bloc was difficult, all agreed that they had to remain despite severe harassment levelled at the staff.³³¹

A Committee on Communism, which included Foreign Office as well as military personnel, was sanctioned by Attlee.³³² To use and distribute the ever growing material on the Soviet Union and the Soviet orbit frequent bulletins were started. FORD, often instrumental in producing them, for example, regularly published a *Bulletin on Communist Party Affairs*.³³³ Amongst other internal reports were the frequent *Monthly Review of Soviet Tactics* and the *Summary of Indications regarding Soviet Foreign Policy*. Within this debate it was occasionally argued that the higher echelons within the Foreign Office, the Deputy and Assistant Under-Secretaries, should have access to the Cabinet papers on foreign policy and the Cabinet conclusions on them.³³⁴ The link between policy suggestion and its discussion at a higher level was seemingly too weak for those who wanted to ensure that these two parts of British foreign policy planning would complement each other while suggesting the best possible policy options.

The primary problem of securing relevant and up-to-date information from the Soviet Union continued and elicited frank discussion within the Northern Department; within this debate the discussion about the usefulness of reading the Soviet press for clues to future Soviet policies was important. The Joint Press Reading Service in Moscow was expensive and had a difficult time keeping up with translating all relevant material. While Rae and Hankey argued against paying too much attention to the Soviet press, Roberts and Violet Connelly of FORD remained convinced that the study of available Soviet newspapers could yield important clues.³³⁵ This was a crucial point as the still relatively new IRD used material from the Soviet press and Soviet contacts to produce British propaganda

³³¹ FO371/86731-NS1023/18/G168, FO, 'RST February / March 1950', 16.5.1950; FO371/86709-NS1013/12/, Kelly, 'Quarterly report', 19.5.1950; FO371/86748-NS1051/30/, FO, 'Brief for the Foreign Secretary for a conference with the US State Department on 'Relations with orbit countries'', 21.4.1950; FO371/86747-NS1051/22/, FO, 'Treatment of Western diplomatic missions in the Soviet orbit', 13.3.1950.

³³² FO371/71648-N134/31/G38, notes of meeting in Mayhew's room on December 30th, 1947, 30.12.1947; FO371/77617-N4692/1051/G38, Terms of reference for new Committee that was to review HMG's Anti-Communist policy and organisation, 12.5.1949.

³³³ For example, FO371/77563-N2015/1015/38 and FO371/77563-N3830/1015/38.

³³⁴ FO371/71687-N1869/765/G38, Jebb to Sargent, 16.1.1948.

³³⁵ FO371/71670-N2883/207/38, 'Importance of the Soviet press as guide to Soviet policy', 2.3.1948.

material.³³⁶ Reading and reacting to the Soviet press also had other implications; it was, for example, considered to answer more fully to Soviet 'charges' in its propaganda in order to possibly prompt clearer statements about future Soviet plans.³³⁷

By 1948 the Northern Department was more than ever before aware that Soviet propaganda was part of a consistent and sustained attack on British democracy and its foreign policy. Peace in particular, Judt has argued, became the 'centre piece of Soviet cultural strategy.'³³⁸ Retaliation had proven more difficult than initially anticipated; to persuade the Foreign Secretary and the Cabinet that Britain had to step up its own propaganda campaign while taking off its still rather velvety gloves took longer than officials had imagined in the face of the growing Communist threat. But by then the Northern Department by 1948 was well linked to outside agencies and well prepared in its expertise to deal with Soviet policies worldwide. The specialists spent a lot of their time re-visiting Soviet ideology and its propaganda and organisational tactics to devise the best possible retaliation approach. Communism, the Cominform as the international centre for the organisation and dissemination of the Kremlin's plans for world revolution, and the Peace Campaign were major issues discussed. The obvious Sovietisation of Eastern Europe and thus the extension of Communism's geographical extent was another important area of interest.

The continuous diplomatic fighting over Germany and its future role as well as the surprising defection of Tito from the grip of Stalin complicated British policy towards these countries. Much was still uncertain and the end result not yet clear. The British nevertheless had by now put their faith firmly in Western consolidation and a close relationship with the USA as well as in conflict resolution in the UNO. NATO and the Western Union institutionalised these plans, a development reciprocated at least partially in the Soviet bloc. Another major concern, especially after Berlin, was the likelihood of war. Although ostensibly a military issue, it was nevertheless extensively discussed in papers and memoranda reflecting a very real concern about the prospect of a new European war.

³³⁶ FO371/71713-N8986/8986/38 and FO371/71714-N11767/8986/38, IRD digests for 1948; the first was published on July 27th, 1948.

³³⁷ FO371/71632A-N13368/1/G38, Rae note and discussion, 7.12.1948.

³³⁸ Judt, *Postwar*, p. 221.

Chapter Five: The Soviet Union and Soviet foreign policy, 1948-1950

Anything to do with the Politburo and the activities of its members is shrouded in mystery.

Harrison to Hankey, 19.9.1948³³⁹

While the Northern Department remained very interested in Soviet affairs, the progress of post-war reconstruction and the Five Year Plan, what happened at the top of the Soviet hierarchy became an ever more important issue. While the previous few years had seen the main focus on economic, military and social developments, these, although still playing an important role in the assessment of the country, by 1948 were overshadowed by important personnel changes in the Soviet Union.³⁴⁰ But here, as elsewhere, the lack of first hand information, as Harrison indicated above, was severe and at a time when the importance of psychology in policy and propaganda was increasingly recognised this proved a real disadvantage. Playing into the hands of the Soviet Desk, however, were changes in the top party leadership which were discussed at length in the Soviet press. As this information came in and as the complexities of the process of foreign policy formation in the Soviet Union were better understood, theories in the Foreign Office became more sophisticated.³⁴¹

The death of Andrei Zhdanov, considered Stalin's right-hand man, on August 31st, 1948 started a re-shuffling of posts between older and more inexperienced party personnel.³⁴² The longstanding differences of opinion between Zhdanov and Malenkov, now regarded as likely successor to Stalin, seem to have gone mostly unnoticed at the time. Concerning the role of top party leaders in the organisation and running of the economy, the dispute was settled only with Zhdanov's death.³⁴³ The following year saw the beginnings of the first real post-war purge with the elimination of Zhdanov's supporters and protégés within the Leningrad party organisation. Eventually resulting in the deaths of senior party leaders,

³³⁹ FO371/71666-N10226/95/38.

³⁴⁰ By 1948 the destruction caused by the war had been essentially overcome, Gorlizki & Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, p. 69.

³⁴¹ Aspaturian, *Process and Power*, p. 39.

³⁴² On Zhdanov's death see FO371/71666.

³⁴³ Harris, *The Split in Stalin's Secretariat*; Harris, 'The Origins of the Conflict'; Gorlizki & Khlevniuk have argued that Zhdanov's death sparked the power struggle between different groups, *Cold Peace*, p. 73.

like A.A. Kuznetsov, Popkov, Kaputsin and Rodionov, and of highly qualified economic specialists, like N.A. Voznessenskii, the head of Gosplan, it heralded according to some historians a much bigger purge.³⁴⁴ When later reports appeared suggesting similar changes to the Moscow party organisation conclusions were difficult to draw because of a lack of reliable first hand information. The Northern Department, however, with only access to official information released in the Soviet press had a difficult time analysing these important events.³⁴⁵ Khrushchev, officials reckoned, was in the aftermath of this Leningrad Affair brought in as a counterweight to Malenkov's increased national profile.³⁴⁶ Equally, changes within the Ministry of State Security, in the past a good indicator of purges to come, were noted but staff had difficulties to assess the importance of these developments.³⁴⁷

The literature addressing issues regarding the top leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has grown rapidly in the past few years. Unlike the Northern Department at the time, access to archives, interviews and the publication of memoirs has helped piece together the last years of Stalin's reign. In particular, the mechanics of the party leadership, their patronage networks and the differences between those at the top have been addressed. These discussions have helped to shed more light on some of the events mentioned above: the ministerial changes in 1948, the Leningrad Affair in 1949, and, in addition, the Doctor's plot (which will be discussed in the third part). Patronage networks have attracted a lot of attention from historians. This is important as a better understanding of them, their impact and their place in the 'affairs' and purges of the later 1940's could facilitate the understanding of the Soviet system at work. Gorlizki and Khlevniuk have argued that these 'neo-patrimonial' networks resulted in an unstable system.³⁴⁸ The Mingrelian Affair, for example, is thought to have been executed to reduce Beria's increased power and influence

³⁴⁴ For example, Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union*, p. 315.

³⁴⁵ For example, FO371/77580-9553 and 77580-9560, Moscow Chancery and Rae notes, 22.7.1949 and 26.7.1949; FO371/77601-N2581/1023/G38, notes of extraordinary RC meeting, 11.3.1949; on the debate about Voznessenskii see FO371/77630-N5013/1102/G38, Harrison note, 25.5.1949; FO371/86719-NS10111/10, Russian Secretariat, 'Recent Personnel Changes in Moscow', 15.2.1950.

³⁴⁶ FO371/77565-N10757/1015/38, election of Khrushchev as Moscow Communist Party Secretary, 18.12.1949.

³⁴⁷ FO371/86719-NS10111/27, Uffen note, 30.10.1950.

³⁴⁸ Gorlizki & Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, p. 9 and 64.

which was largely based on such networks.³⁴⁹ Rigby, however, noted that these networks in actual fact stabilised Soviet political life.³⁵⁰

Thought to have been the result of rivalries between Politburo members, the Leningrad Affair/ Gosplan Affair was the first instance in post-war years of a purge that resulted in the executing of some of the accused.³⁵¹ Starting after Zhdanov's death with the explicit motive of removing his supporters and protégés, and thus to break up his patronage network, it led to the conviction of over two hundred party members.³⁵² It appears that a 'cadre revolution' was being carried out.³⁵³ It is argued that it was Stalin himself who, always fearing that his lieutenants did not need his guidance anymore, oversaw these events.³⁵⁴ Others see it as Beria's success or a combined Beria/ Malenkov effort.³⁵⁵ Volkogonov, more colourfully, noted that 'the Moscow Camarilla' wanted action.³⁵⁶ Nearly all agree that one underlying reason for this purge was the perceived independence of the Leningrad party organisation which, to Stalin at least, suggested possible disloyalty.³⁵⁷ The Soviet political elite itself, Stalin knew, was the real threat to himself.

The replacement of Viacheslav Molotov, who had long tested the nerves of British diplomats, with Andrei Vyshinski, who had come to prominence as state prosecutor in the infamous show trials of the 1930s, after the disaster of the Berlin Blockade was much

³⁴⁹ P.S. Deriabin, *Inside Stalin's Kremlin: An Eyewitness Account of Brutality, Duplicity and Intrigue* (Brassey's, Dulles, VA, 1998), p. 69; A. Knight, *Beria: Stalin's first Lieutenant* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993), p. 159ff.

³⁵⁰ T.H. Rigby, *Political Elites in the Soviet Union: Central Leaders and Local Cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev* (Edward Elgar, Aldershot, 1990), p. 127.

³⁵¹ Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, p. 132-133; D. Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen: An Authoritative Portrait of a Tyrant and those who served him* (Penguin, London, 2005), pp. 430ff.

³⁵² B. Tromly, 'The Leningrad Affair and Soviet Patronage Politics, 1949-1950' in *EAS* 56 (5) (2004), p. 707; J. Crowfoot & M. Harrison, 'The USSR Council of Ministers under late Stalinism, 1945-1954: Its Production Branch Composition and the Requirements of National Economy and Policy', in *SS* 42 (1) (1990), p. 54.

³⁵³ J. Cooper, M. Perrie, EA Rees (eds.), *Soviet History, 1917 to 1953* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995), p. 170; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 50.

³⁵⁴ Gorlizki & Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, p. 88.

³⁵⁵ S. Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 2003), p. 613; Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union*, p. 313ff; S. Pons argued that it was Malenkov who was the main 'purger', in Channon, *Politics, Society and Stalinism*, ch. 5; J. Löwenhardt, J.Ozinga and E. van Ree (eds.), *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Politburo* (UCLP, London, 1992), p. 36.

³⁵⁶ D. Volkogonov, *Stalin: Triumph and Tragedy* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1991), p. 521.

³⁵⁷ G. Roberts, *Stalin's Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006), p. 338; Keep, *Last of the Empires*, p. 34.

discussed in the Foreign Office.³⁵⁸ While the Northern Department thought that he had indeed fallen out of favour, Peterson in Moscow disagreed; although a few months later rumours appeared suggesting the arrest of Molotov's wife.³⁵⁹ Although Vyshinski was seen by the Northern Department as tactically superior to Molotov there was only little hope that this change of personnel would lead to better East West understanding. The appointment of Andrei Gromyko as one of Vyshinski's deputies meant the return to the Soviet Union of a man who had gained a lot of first hand experience of the West in the Soviet embassy in Washington and the UN headquarters in New York. But this appointment equally did not result in an easing of Anglo-Soviet tension. This change among those in close contact with the West was puzzling.

Although the composition of the Politburo was known, it was of little use when the functions of the members and their relationships were unknown.³⁶⁰ The issue of divergences of opinions within the Politburo, though much discussed, has not yet been settled. Without further archival access it is doubtful if it ever will. Khlevniuk states categorically that there were no factions.³⁶¹ Harris argues equally convincingly for a significant split between Malenkov and Zhdanov, until Zhdanov's death.³⁶² At the time the Northern Department tended not to speculate because there was no evidence to support either case.³⁶³ It seems clear, however, that there was a struggle between groups to gain an advantage with Stalin.³⁶⁴ Interestingly, Zubkova has written that it seemed that Stalin, in all this, was not actually able to control his 'entourage' very well.³⁶⁵

The Soviet Union between 1948 and 1950 went through a number of important developments which ultimately were designed to strengthen the leadership and its hold on the country as well as the industrial/military potential of the Soviet Union. Speeches and

³⁵⁸ FO371/77576-N2197/10112/38, Peterson, 5.3.1949; also FO371/77576, FO371/77577; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 78.

³⁵⁹ FO371/77576-N2265/10112/38, FO, 'Significance of Molotov's replacement', 7.3.1949 and FO371/77576-N2303/10112/38, 9.3.1949.

³⁶⁰ FO371/77577-N2580/10112/38 and FO371/77577-N2645/10112/38.

³⁶¹ O. Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and his inner Circle* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009), p. 249.

³⁶² Harris, *The Split in Stalin's Secretariat*.

³⁶³ Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War*, p.212.

³⁶⁴ Keep, *Last of the Empires*, p. 25.

³⁶⁵ Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, p. 147.

articles pointed out the threat from abroad which demanded a further acceleration of industrialisation and the extension of the military-industrial complex.³⁶⁶ The race to build and test a Soviet atomic bomb, achieved in 1949, continued as a race to develop a hydrogen bomb. Aspaturian points out quite rightly that possession of the bomb, amongst other technological innovations, were of prime importance for a country considering itself a global power; Britain, of course, saw it exactly the same way.³⁶⁷ As more and more of the total Soviet budget was used for these efforts, the standard of living for the population not surprisingly stagnated and at times even decreased. The perseverance with which Stalin tried to secure reparations from Germany, against all opposition, may be more understandable against this background.³⁶⁸

While Stalin used his iron will to form the country he thought he needed in order to succeed in his eventual goal of a Soviet controlled proletarian world revolution, his foreign policy was not so successful. According to Vladislav Zubok he never succeeded in understanding the motivations of American foreign policy and its interventions, while Mastny argued that Stalin followed a policy of testing the West's 'soft spots'.³⁶⁹ The resulting disasters in Berlin and Yugoslavia (discussed in detail in the next chapters) only added to his anxiety about the dangers of encirclement. The British ambassador Sir John Killick much later suggested that 'my conviction is that Soviet foreign policy since 1917 essentially was a position of turning Clausewitz on its head: Foreign policy was a continuation of war by other means.'³⁷⁰

Roberts has classified this phase as that of 'Cold War confrontation', lodged between that of the 'Grand Alliance' and eventual 'De-escalation'.³⁷¹ Mackintosh, much earlier, had suggested that between 1944 and 1947 the Kremlin exploited its victory in World War II, while between 1947 and 1953 it was reduced to reacting to policies emerging from the USA and Britain.³⁷² Much evidence can be provided to support this point: in particular Soviet policies and initiatives following the announcement of the Truman Doctrine and the

³⁶⁶ Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*, p. 172; Mastny, 'Stalin and the Militarisation'.

³⁶⁷ Aspaturian, *Process and Power*, p. 11; Saunders, *Losing an Empire*, p. 15.

³⁶⁸ A. Nove, *An Economic History of the Soviet Union, 1917 to 1991* (Penguin Books, London, 1992), p. 296.

³⁶⁹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 49; Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War*, p. 305.

³⁷⁰ Quoted in G. Staerck, 'The Role of HM Embassy in Moscow' in *CBH 14* (3) (2000), p. 150.

³⁷¹ Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics*, p. 13.

³⁷² Mackintosh, *Strategy and Tactics*, pp. 17-18.

Marshall Plan, the founding of NATO and the suggestion to include West Germany in a European Defence Community. The stalemate in international diplomacy between East and West reached by 1953 was in the end a defeat for Stalin; his successes were essentially limited to those areas originally liberated by the Red Army.³⁷³ Efforts elsewhere had met with very limited success. Stalin found, as William Taubman has noted, that the 'West refused to play the role assigned to it by him.'³⁷⁴

Although, as Hosking argues, Stalin from 1948 onwards oversaw a Soviet empire in Eastern Europe, it did not provide the security he had craved.³⁷⁵ Yalta remained unfinished business as Stalin continued to hope for an American/British acceptance of his Soviet preponderance in Eastern Europe; the Kremlin took the October 1944 agreement seriously.³⁷⁶ Formerly promising developments in the Far East, with the victory of Mao over Kuomintang forces in 1949 and the promise of a short conflict in Korea in 1950, turned into a double-edged sword. While Mao proved a dedicated but independent Communist, the conflict in Korea brought American forces close to the border of the Soviet Union in a war that proved difficult to end. Nevertheless there was hope for Stalin. The detonation of a Soviet atomic bomb evened out the perceived imbalance of American technological superiority. Today there is little evidence that the American possession of the atomic bomb was an asset in discussions with the Soviet leadership, and possibly vice versa.³⁷⁷

At the same time, it also became more apparent that the world order was becoming bipolar.³⁷⁸ This, Robert Service argues, actually increased the feeling of security for the Kremlin, until, it can be assumed, the outbreak of the Korean War.³⁷⁹ The turn in Soviet foreign policy noted in the historiography occurred in 1947 after the withdrawal from

³⁷³ Mackintosh, *Strategy*, p. 30 and 61.

³⁷⁴ Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*, p. 129.

³⁷⁵ Hosking, *A History of the Soviet Union*, p. 320; Mawdsley has argued that Stalin's fear of the outside world grew after the war, *Thunder in the East* (Hodder Arnold, London, 2005), p. 405.

³⁷⁶ Brzezinski, 'The Future of Yalta', p. 949; A. Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (Bodley Head, London, 2009), p. 161.

³⁷⁷ On the role of espionage here see, for example, G. Hosking, *Russia and the Russians: From Earliest Times to 2001* (Penguin Books, London, 2001), p. 513; D. Holloway, 'Stalin and the Bomb' in Leffler, *Origins of the Cold War*, pp. 72-91.

³⁷⁸ P.G. Lauren, G. A. Craig, A. L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Challenges of our Time* (OUP, Oxford, 2007), p. 93; according to Watt the world in 1945 was not yet bipolar, in Ovendale, *The Foreign Policies*, pp. 43-61.

³⁷⁹ Service, *Comrades*, p. 243.

negotiations for the Marshall Plan and were preceded by a telegram which supported a very 'hawkish' interpretation of American foreign policy.³⁸⁰ Marxism, it had been noted, did not provide a blueprint for Communist diplomacy in a world considered as hostile.³⁸¹ And this, it could well be argued, may well have been at the root of the problem. No blueprint demanded an assessment of choices and a measured response to secure the envisaged objectives. However, this demanded adequate negotiating skills as well as an in-depth understanding of international relations, its function and methods.

³⁸⁰ C. Read, *The Stalin Years* (Arnold, London, 1999), pp. 180-183.

³⁸¹ Noguee & Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 14.

Chapter Six: The ND view of the threat from Communist ideology, 1948-1950

International Communism, organised and tightly controlled by the Kremlin is, in combination with the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, such a threat to peace that we may be justified in making use of any force capable of disrupting it.

Russia Committee memorandum, 6.1. 1950³⁸²

The simple kosher Jew goes to see the rabbi and tells him, 'Rabbi, the world is in turmoil; they're preparing for a new war. You are so wise, tell me: can we really not avoid war?' 'War? No, there will be no war, my son. But the fight for peace will be so bad that no stone will be left standing.'

Joke cited in *Hammer and Tickle*³⁸³

Realpolitik should, towards the end of the war, have dictated to end the pretence of indefinite cooperation; Capitalism and Communism by ideological definition were incompatible, each awaiting the other's demise for its own ends. The dithering in diplomacy, particularly on the Western side, between the end of the war and the failure of the last CFM in London in December 1947 was one result of this indecision. As important and understandable as the discussion and pre-settlement of political issues during wartime was it also tied the hands of those who had to deal with the detailed implementation of these after the war. Since there had been no precedent for this sort of alliance, there was now no precedent of how to maintain or end it. Arguably, a realistic assessment by all three sides would have revealed that the prolongation of this alliance out-with the UNO was improbable and that some form of peaceful cooperation was all that should be expected. As the Russia Committee concluded in the quote above, Communism in British eyes had turned into a credible threat. The Foreign Office knew that having proven its worth on the battlefields of the war, the Soviet government would demand not only international recognition but also a commanding voice in international politics. However, to match the aspirations, strategies and tactics of the liberal and democratic West and the totalitarian and

³⁸² FO371/86750-NS1052/4, RC, 'Anti-Stalinist Communism', 6.1.1950.

³⁸³ Ben Lewis, *Hammer and Tickle* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 2008), p. 128.

Communist East proved essentially impossible.³⁸⁴ Communist ideology proved to be a new and sustained threat that could not be ignored and had to be fully understood in order to be effectively addressed.

6.1. Communist ideology

By the end of World War I ideology had emerged as a major force in European politics and by the 1930s as a major threat to European peace. Communist ideology had survived World War II and emerged as an established political ideology. The war had elevated the Soviet Union, as the first country practising Socialism, to the position of a world power with commensurate diplomatic influence and political gravitas. Newly confident, the Soviet Union now made her future intentions clear and proclaimed that the expected post-war chaos in Europe in particular offered great opportunities for the spread of Communism through revolution. World revolution would enhance the security of the country itself and a secure Soviet Union could more effectively direct world revolution. In order to take the lead in this crusade, it now became vital that domestic strength mirrored external strength and that Communism was promoted as an attractive ideology with a lot of potential for the future. It was not surprising, that the Western powers perceived Communism soon as a global challenge which, so far, had been contained only in Europe.³⁸⁵ Not without reason has Mastny noted that ‘never did the totalitarian ideology of a fully regimented body politic come closer to perfection than in Russia under Stalin.’³⁸⁶ As a result this ideology, as a potent tool in the hands of the Kremlin and communists abroad, presented a real danger to Britain and British interests.³⁸⁷

The Foreign Office was no novice in the appreciation of Communism and the overall consensus was clear:

³⁸⁴ Bevin had confidently referred to Communism as a form of totalitarianism in a speech, FO371/71687-N765/765/G38, 15.1.1948.

³⁸⁵ Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, ch. 5.

³⁸⁶ Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War*, p. 7.

³⁸⁷ Conquest has argued that it was not only ideology that was the problem but the inability of Soviet leaders to see the world in any other way, *Present Danger*, p. 12.

Communism is the vehicle of an aggressive ideology [which takes the] hostility of the non-communist world to the Soviet Union [as] a basic assumption of Marxist –Leninist thought. Not only aggressive, it was also considered militarist to the point that the use of armed intervention is recognised as a legitimate means of extending the revolution.³⁸⁸

In January 1950, after experiencing four and a half years of Soviet inspired Communism in Eastern Europe, Thomas Brimelow in a lecture to the Joint Services Staff College equally concluded that the Soviet Union ‘is inspired by an aggressive revolutionary ideology.’³⁸⁹ Attlee himself thought the Soviets ‘ideological imperialists.’³⁹⁰ The semicircle of satellites around the Western border of the Soviet Union had brought this ideology directly to the front door of the Western European democracies. Opportunities for the careful territorial expansion of the Soviet Union had taken precedence over the retention of good relations with her Allies. If the study of history had taught the Soviet leaders one certainty, it was that opportunities should be exploited when they seemed to present themselves so readily. The ultimate aim, the Russia Committee reckoned, was worth the risk:

the eventual planned organisation of a planned world economy and political system directed from Moscow by means of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, in other words by the means of a self-appointed priesthood of Communist leaders,

and in more direct terms: ‘a Stalinist world.’³⁹¹ The only consolation was that war for the Soviet government was neither an objective nor a means to an end.³⁹² The merging of Russian expansionism with Communist ideology presented new opportunities and problems for the Soviet leadership while the perpetual struggle between the will and need to export Communism and the requirements of Soviet national security remained difficult to overcome.³⁹³

³⁸⁸ FO371/71631-N10521/1/38, FORD paper on Anglo-Soviet relations, 3.9.1948.

³⁸⁹ FO371/86731-NS1023/3/G8, draft lecture, 19.1.1950.

³⁹⁰ Sfikas, ‘Towards a Regional Study’, p. 217.

³⁹¹ FO371/77603-N4488/1023/G38, RC, ‘The Peace offensive: tactical deviation or change of long term policy’, 13.5.1949.

³⁹² ‘They are not madmen like Hitler’, Mayhew noted, FO371/86733-NS1023/40, 18.9.1950.

³⁹³ FO371/77622-N11007/1051/G38, FO, ‘British policy towards the USSR’, 28.7.1949.

The reality of Communism, in such close proximity and the prospect of continuous Soviet expansion to further enhance the security of the country worried the Foreign Office.³⁹⁴ To the Northern Department this presented a threat which became serious once the Soviet Union sprung into action to export this ideology. Particularly by the spring of 1948, once the Eastern European countries had been safely brought more or less into line, the Kremlin stepped up its initiatives to achieve what had been announced as Communist policy at the Cominform foundation conference in September 1947: the defeat of the ERP in order to retard Western European recovery, hinder further European integration and engineer a revolutionary situation of which to take advantage.³⁹⁵ Hankey, then Head of the Northern Department, worried that this might be rather easily achieved.³⁹⁶

Communism was attractive to many who did not know better and the weakened not exactly unified democratic governments of Western Europe had not put up a strong or effective defence so far. It was not really surprising that the Soviet government in these circumstances, seeking security and Communist expansion, tried to take advantage of the situation. But even then, the Northern Department argued, 'one cardinal rule of Communist procedure is not to proceed to a major attack until everything is ready and there are very good chances of success.'³⁹⁷ This, of course, was exactly the problem and the solution to the Foreign Office: good information was necessary to assess how strong Communist support and organisation really was, and precise plans and Cabinet approval were needed to thwart any Soviet efforts to increase that strength and extend Soviet influence.³⁹⁸ Until that time when definite Soviet strength emerged, the West would be relatively safe: 'one of the differences between Hitler ...and the ruling clique in Moscow today is that while the former did not really mind if he did provoke a major war, the probability is that the latter do not wish to do so, anyhow at present...', Harrison noted in March 1948.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁴ FO371/86761-NS1053/17, RC, 9.5.1950; FO371/86760-NS1052/102, draft text for a speech for the Foreign Secretary, 1.12.1950; FO371/77604-N5210/1023/G38, Cripps note, 27.5.1949.

³⁹⁵ FO371/71650-N5404/31/38, Hankey, 'The Communist Campaign', 8.5.1948.

³⁹⁶ FO371/71650-N5416/31/38, Hankey, 10.5.1948.

³⁹⁷ FO371/71670-N1759/207/G38, Hankey, 13.2.1948; a rule arguably ignored in Korea a few months later; also FO371/77560-N705/1013/38, Rae comment on 'Examination of the main internal weaknesses of the present regime in the USSR from the standpoint of its long-term durability', 13.1.1949.

³⁹⁸ The use of intelligence in the discussion and formation of British foreign policy is still under-researched.

³⁹⁹ FO371/71670-N3449/207/38, Harrison, 12.3.1948; this theory was broadly agreed on throughout the Foreign Office.

The Marxist theory of an economic slump across the Capitalist world promised a neat solution to the problem of exporting the revolution and, mistaking normal post-war economic difficulties for a proof of Marxist theory, the Soviet leadership decided to keep up the pressure across Europe through its mass organisations and propaganda considering Capitalism doomed and already in its death throes.⁴⁰⁰ As Marxism taught, during a post-war period the economic difficulties would prove too extensive to be dealt with sufficiently by the respective governments thus leading to severe inter-power rivalries for resources and markets. At the same time the deteriorating economic and social conditions would radicalise the workers. This emphasis on a slump in capitalist countries was, apart from the Peace Campaign, the main Soviet propaganda theme. The Kremlin simply hoped that with an economic crisis American support for the ERP would wane and leave the continent open to Communist penetration. They had a point, the Northern Department reluctantly admitted.⁴⁰¹ A year later Rae succinctly pointed out why: ‘the Cold War is more destructive to this side of the curtain than to the other, and the Politburo must surely know it.’⁴⁰² All the Soviet Union had to do was to wait and prepare the ground as effectively as possible to reap the rewards when the time came.

Stalin’s doctrine of Peaceful Co-existence was effectively only bridging this time and did not change the fundamental Soviet truth that war was essentially inevitable. ‘Peaceful Co-existence was a Soviet tactic calculated to lull suspicion [and] it cost nothing’, Barker concluded in a memorandum by his Russian Secretariat.⁴⁰³ Peaceful Co-existence also offered other opportunities, as the US chargé d’affaires Foy Kohler told Harrison in February 1949:

the Soviet Union seems to have been basing policies and actions in the expectation of peace for the near future, believing itself save from attack the Soviet government has deliberately chosen to weaken itself to a certain extent during the next few years - the Tito dispute, purges, collectivisation etc – in order to gain strength for a later inevitable conflict in which it continues to believe.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ For example, FO371/71670-N3820/207/38, Barker memorandum, 24.3.1948.

⁴⁰¹ FO371/71679-N642/368/G38, Lambert and Harrison notes, 16.1.1948.

⁴⁰² FO371/77601-N2632/1023/G38, Rae paper, 7.3.1949.

⁴⁰³ FO371/71670-N3820/207/38, Baker Memorandum, 24.3.1948; FO371/86767-NS1073/1, Oleshuk in a lecture on ‘The international situation’ pointed out that it was only possible within a narrowly confined historical perspective, 22.5.1950.

⁴⁰⁴ FO371/77599-N1344/1023/38, 4.2.1949.

All this, not surprisingly, provoked intense debates within the Northern Department and the Foreign Office in general. Of particular interest was the problem of whether or not the Soviet leadership actually believed in their ideology. Hankey certainly suspected that they did, as did nearly all those in the Department and the Moscow Embassy. Others, however, disagreed. Dixon pragmatically wrote that 'after all, Communism was merely a convenience for the Russian revolutionaries.'⁴⁰⁵ The major problem here was that personal contact was so limited that it was impossible to make a confident judgement in this matter. That leaders might say one thing in public and another in private was well known. Soviet public pronouncements on the issue were therefore problematic, a fact often admitted amongst officials.⁴⁰⁶

The apparent nearness of Communism caused its own theoretical problems and the more the public discussion suggested that it was nearly within reach, the more these had to be addressed. The Northern Department followed these discussions very closely to assess if and how they might offer opportunities for the West in the coming years. How Communist ideology was adjusted to changing reality would be a strong indicator of how much potential Peaceful Co-existence really had and how long it would be a useful Soviet tactic; how Soviet Communism was organised domestically could provide important clues to the future stability of the country and the possibilities for covert intervention. Stalin's management of this was a perfect example of the merging of Realpolitik and a well defined ideological construct and, as the Northern Department argued, 'represents perhaps the best hope that the world may avoid catastrophe.'⁴⁰⁷

It revealed both the strengths and weaknesses of Communist ideology. It was obviously able to evolve and adapt to different realities as required, and even more importantly it also revealed that these adjustments were made in response to pressure applied from outside. Here potentially lay a real chance for Western foreign policy to have a significant impact on the perceived threat of Soviet Communism. Even though the adjustments had been made as a last resort, the Soviet leadership did make these adjustments rather than to retain an ideological model which proved difficult to reconcile with their own perceived needs.

⁴⁰⁵ FO371/71671-N5284/207/38, Dixon from Prague to Hankey, 30.4.1948.

⁴⁰⁶ FO371/66373-N12959/271/38, Peterson, 8.11.1947.

⁴⁰⁷ FO371/77564-N7745/1015/38, FO, 'Transition from Socialism to Communism', 22.8.1949.

This struggle between a relatively neat ideological construct and the need to apply it to ever changing circumstances proved challenging for the Kremlin.⁴⁰⁸ Stalin was frequently flexible in tactics to get what he wanted. During a Russia Committee meeting it was noted that ‘Hankey thought that Stalin’s foreign policy might be compared to his war strategy, in that when one offensive failed or ceased to yield results he always has another ready to be launched.’⁴⁰⁹ The combination of ideology, preparedness, flexibility, imagination and boldness was considered highly effective.

All this led to the question of what Communism would really change.⁴¹⁰ Although this appears to be foremost a theoretical point, it did have huge implications for the future and the potential disaffection of millions with a future that might not be as fabulous as it had previously been described and it could offer unique opportunities to the West. If, as the Northern Department considered during the late summer of 1949 when this issue was hotly debated, it all came down to ‘Lenin’s famous equation of electricity plus socialism’, it would be difficult even for the Soviet propaganda machine to see this as the future of world Communism. On the other hand the Kremlin could well choose to make a drastic distinction between the reality of Communism in the Soviet Union and in other countries. In early 1950 a memorandum on the ‘Transition to Communism’ assumed that

the purpose of the propaganda ...is to point out the carrot to the donkey [because] without the propaganda the donkey might forget about the carrot and it is fair to assume that this particular donkey needs quite a lot of persuading that the carrot is there at all.⁴¹¹

Communism, it seems, was still not really a heart and minds ideology but, as always argued in the Foreign Office, an imposed political doctrine.

⁴⁰⁸ FO371/77604-N5832/1023/38, note on a FORD memorandum on ‘The deviation factor in Soviet foreign policy since 1924’, 24.5.1949.

⁴⁰⁹ FO371/77623-N3817/1052/38, 26.4.1949; a Northern Department lecture concluded in January 1950 that Stalin was undoubtedly a realist, FO371/86731-NS1023/3, 19.1.1950.

⁴¹⁰ FO371/77563-N3830/1015/38, Hankey note on FORD ‘Bulletin on Communist Party affairs January-March 1949’, 28.4.1949.

⁴¹¹ FO371/86711-NS1015/9, FORD, ‘The transition to Communism’, 20.1.1950; FO371/77564-7912, Rae note, 22.8.1949.

A related and important issue, and a discussion very closely watched in the Foreign Office, was that of the security and armed forces in Communism. For the Northern Department this was a major issue of concern and interest with potentially very important implications for Soviet, and therefore British, foreign policy and military strategy. When an economic slump in the West became a more distant hope by 1949, Soviet propaganda turned more directly to the theme of Western preparation for an aggressive war against the Soviet Union. Here more than in any other propaganda argument did the issues of post-war reconstruction, internationalism and peace come together and in actual fact helped the Soviet government support another major adjustment in Communist ideology. Being part of the state, the army and punitive organs too should in theory wither away with the state. However, the capitalist encirclement was used to justify the continued existence of these services. At the same time, on the international scene, the Soviet Union very neatly manoeuvred herself into the position of champion of peace, unable to initiate a war due to restrictions by its ideology, by declaring that because of 'its very nature the land of Socialism cannot wage aggressive war [and] cannot pursue imperialist aims.'⁴¹² The West, pursuing military consolidation in NATO and the proposed European Defence Community, was thus on the defensive. That this was an example of creating an environment fertile for specific Communist propaganda initiatives was well recognised.

Even if the Kremlin would not intentionally start an aggressive war, the Foreign Office knew that any decision to do so would be based as much on facts as on perceptions of strength, weaknesses and of threats both of the Soviet Union and of the outside world. The fear of attack by the Capitalist powers was, the Foreign Office admitted, probably quite genuine.⁴¹³ A more immediate problem, as the Northern Department and the COS well realised, was that the danger of conflict would rise exponentially once the Kremlin grasped that she could no achieve her aims by other methods.⁴¹⁴ A paper by the PUSD on 'British policy towards Soviet Communism' made this point very clear: 'Russian policy today is more dangerous...Russian and her satellites represent a vast agglomeration of power [and] this power is animated by a militant ideology which aims at the overthrow of all systems

⁴¹² FO371/77568-N3719/1017/38, 22.4.1949; Warner and Kelly in the RC agreed, FO371/86761-NA1053/7, 21.2.1950.

⁴¹³ FO371/77603-N4488/1023/38, RC, 13.5.1949.

⁴¹⁴ FO371/77609-N769/1024/38, Hankey, 18.1.1949.

not on conformity with it.’⁴¹⁵ Not without reason did Rae remind his audience at the Staff College in Camberley in March 1950 that ‘we must remember that the Soviet Union is organised permanently on a more or less war footing.’⁴¹⁶ David Kelly, British ambassador in Moscow, added a worrying implication:

they will continue to believe in the approaching inevitable disintegration of the West...but my feeling of the atmosphere leads me to think that we should now reckon on there being some limits to the extent to which this ‘apocalyptic’ doctrine will act as a brake in all circumstances.⁴¹⁷

Aggressive war, it seemed, was not that far out-with the purview of Communism as to make it impossible. This interplay of reality, ideology, perceptions and intentions was dangerous, as subsequent Cold War crises were to prove.

The Foreign Office knew that Soviet foreign policies were based on Realpolitik as well as on Communist ideology.⁴¹⁸ What was used in which circumstances depended on the Kremlin’s assessment of the international situation. In a way, both the Soviet Union and the West had limited choices in the matter of ideology: the West could not ignore Communist ideology since it was so prominently used in Soviet propaganda and foreign policy, and the Kremlin could not do without this ideology as a large part of its domestic and international credibility depended on it. The major difficulty was that it was essentially impossible to accurately gauge the personal opinions of the Soviet leaders. Educated guess work was thus, as in many reports at the time, an important part of the Northern Departments assessments. The Northern Department had no choice but to take it seriously although the discussion of Communism, possibly with the exception of China, centred around the issues of Soviet intentions and future plans.

⁴¹⁵ FO371/77622-N11007/1051/38, PUSC, ‘British policy towards the Soviet Union’, 28.7.1949; Stepanyan comment during a public lecture in June 1950, FO371/86714-NS1015/62, FORD paper ‘Bulletin of Communist Party affairs January-June 1950’, 6.10.1950.

⁴¹⁶ FO371/86712-NNS1015/20, text of Rae lecture to the Staff College Camberley, 7.3.1950.

⁴¹⁷ FO371/86714-NS1015/61, Kelly letter ‘Personal opinions of Soviet life’, 19.9.1950.

⁴¹⁸ See Aspaturian for a detailed assessment of the function of ideology in Soviet foreign policy, *Process and Power*, pp. 194-195, 200.

Communism was seen as weak and unlikely to survive worldwide if divorced from the Soviet leaders and their determination to implement it. Awareness of this issue as well as of the problem of trying to be a Great Power while simultaneously being the 'fatherland of the international proletariat', both with different and not always reconcilable opportunities, responsibilities and freedoms, prompted further Soviet action. The Cominform became the instrument to establish and then streamline control over foreign Communist parties, and to issue directives. Through this organisation the threat of Communism as a potentially subversive force became more apparent.⁴¹⁹

6.2. The Cominform

The Northern Department was aware that the expanding Soviet empire after 1945 presented the Kremlin with new problems. The technologically still relatively restricted communications opportunities at the time meant that Communist leaders on the spot were unable to consult the Soviet leadership about all problems which arose. While overall policies and strategic aims could periodically be discussed at meetings and conferences, the everyday administration of the satellite countries had to be left in the hands of trusted Communists. National sensibilities, varying experiences throughout the inter-war and war years, and differing ideas of how to realise Marxist theories, however, meant that, while Communism might in theory appear to be a coherent ideology, its implementation in countries with such diverse backgrounds would invariably raise questions which would hardly be answered identically within the orbit states. Individuality meant deviation which made central control from Moscow harder if not impossible.

The Foreign Office was interested to see if and how the Kremlin would try to achieve and maintain control over its new orbit. The Cominform, formed in September 1947, was to be the conduit between the centre and its periphery; it also opened a new stage in the conflict between East and West.⁴²⁰ It was to act as an advisory body to maintain uniformity within the Communist parties in the satellite states as well as act as an enforcing agency for the Kremlin ensuring that policies dictated in Moscow would be implemented by these parties. Interestingly, the SED in the Soviet occupied zone of Germany was not allowed to join

⁴¹⁹ FO371/77569-N7491/1017/38, FORD, 'Survey of Communism in Western Europe', 16.8.1949.

⁴²⁰ FO371/66374-N13701/271/38, RC meeting notes, 23.10.1947 and FO371/66373-N12755/271/38, 4.11.1947.

even though it had proved itself more radical and Stalinist than most other Communist parties. For Western Communist parties it was to act as a sort of intermediary; not all questions which arose could be directly dealt with by the Kremlin itself. To increase its profile and distribute its propaganda more effectively it organised frequent congresses and issued journals. The association of high profile Communists with this agency was an attribute of its importance. Although Northern Department staff argued about its real influence and long-term impact, at the time it was another tool for the Soviet Union to increase and maintain control in East and West, and therefore had to be watched closely.⁴²¹

The Foreign Office, it appears, was interested in the Cominform because it was central to communications between Western Communist parties and the Soviet Union. This direct contact was a serious concern. Propaganda and its effective distribution, the 1930s had proven, could be highly effective in destabilising established political systems. The Northern Department had no choice but to take the Cominform seriously; at least until its actual impact could be properly assessed. By 1950, probably to the relief of the Northern Department, it had become clear that although its propaganda output was high, the Cominform had little impact on Western European affairs. Its prestige had suffered substantially through an aggressive Soviet foreign policy. As a result its main impact remained restricted to Eastern Europe.

The Cominform, established in Poland in September 1947, was a much smaller and more streamlined organisation than previous far left-wing international bodies had been. It was founded in a politically defined and, crucially, post-war environment. Andrei Zhdanov's 'two camp speech' had pointed out the battle lines. The wartime Grand Alliance was unmistakably dead.⁴²² Whether or not there actually were two camps was essentially irrelevant. It was the perception of this reality of this idea that made it so potent and that quickly induced substantial paranoia in Eastern as well as Western governments. It was clear, and had been confirmed by Zhdanov, that the Kremlin demanded the leading role within the Communist world movement and that it would follow its aspirations as far as

⁴²¹ FO371/77590-N10210/10119/38, Rae note on Manchester Guardian article about the Cominform, 29.11.1949.

⁴²² Roberts, *Stalin's Wars*, p. 319.

was safely possible. A memorandum by FORD, reviewing Anglo-Soviet relations since 1939, stated in September 1948 that undoubtedly

the dominant feature of Soviet domestic and foreign policy since the end of the war has been the vehement reassertion of uncompromising Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy [and that] the creation of the Cominform was the ceremonial restatement of the central truth on which Soviet policy is based that the world is divided into two irreconcilably hostile camps.⁴²³

Taking this as a basis for its assessment of Soviet policies and diplomatic manoeuvres, the outlook was bleak: any Soviet gestures of goodwill or offers to negotiate outstanding issues of contention were tactics only.⁴²⁴ The basic strategy would not change if the primary assumption it was based on did not change as well.

But the Cominform was by no means just a tougher copy of earlier attempts to dominate Socialist/Communist parties elsewhere. Both in the 1930s Comintern and in the Cominform there was only one centre of importance, one supreme leader and one overall plan.⁴²⁵ If one added the Soviet criticism of foreign Communist leaders, the purging of their parties and the hard-line propaganda issued by the Comintern, it was not surprising that it thus became an important instrument for coordinating working class responses to different Soviet tactics: anti-ERP strikes, the Peace Campaign, the Stockholm Appeal, the strikes against the Korean War.⁴²⁶ As the Kremlin and obedient Communist leaders in East and West knew, organisation, cooperation and coordination were keys to success. By bypassing the national governments, a favoured Communist tactic, the Cominform called on the 'peoples from below' to implement Soviet strategies in their countries where, adhering to Marxist doctrine, the working class would take the main role in the struggle. But the Cominform was also to work against the growing, and for Stalin troubling, forces

⁴²³ FO371/71631-N10521/1/38, FORD, 'Anglo-Soviet relations since 1939', 3.9.1948; FO371/71631-N10702/1/38, Foreign Office minute on a memorandum for the meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London on international relations with regards to the Soviet Union, 4.10.1948.

⁴²⁴ See also FO371/71667-N96/96/38.

⁴²⁵ FO371/71648-N528/31/G38, Gainer, Warsaw, 9.1.1948.

⁴²⁶ FO371/77589-N6937/10119/38, note by an unidentified official, 25.7.1949.

of nationalism within the orbit states.⁴²⁷ To avoid direct attack from the West the Cominform was run almost like an underground organisation: it was heard but not really seen. This, in particular, made it a real worry to the Foreign Office as it made the assessment of its structure and potential very difficult.

There were inherent weaknesses in its organisation, however. The Cominform did not prove to be the major super-weapon to wield when trying to solve disputes or enforce its policy against reluctant opponents; it could not levy sanctions as such. When the Kremlin tried to use it to bring Tito back into the Soviet controlled Communist fold it failed miserably; this episode more than anything else demonstrated its tactical limits. To deal with the national Communist parties proved extremely difficult for the Kremlin. While Communist leaders within and out-with the orbit may have sincerely dreamt of a Marxist paradise, their national aspirations had been given a boost by their wartime experiences. Western ally during the war or not, the defeat of one oppressor was preferably not to be followed by the imposition of another. What they wanted, and what Stalin could not grant, were different roads to Communism within a loosely organised Communist movement. The Soviet idea of simply imposing its will on the weaker states quickly proved difficult to implement. In the end the Cominform revealed its importance more over its publications of Agitprop and for directing the conduct of the Peace Campaign.

Cominform propaganda was violently anti-Western, arguing that 'like the Fascist aggressor the Anglo-American Bloc is engaged in preparing a new war in all spheres.'⁴²⁸ Whether or not the Kremlin actually believed that war was fairly imminent did not really matter in this instance, the aim was to put the West on the defensive. In the absence of Communist participation in national governments in Western Europe other avenues of influence and subversion had to be explored and it was here that the Cominform saw its chance for further activities. This definition of battle lines opened up opportunities for the West. The Soviet aim of preventing Western consolidation by any means short of war was actual political warfare and required a strong, consistent and continued response from the British

⁴²⁷ R. Girault, 'The Partition of Europe' in Varsori, A. & Calandri, E. (eds.), *The Failure of Peace in Europe* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002), p. 327.

⁴²⁸ FO371/77590-N10214/10119/38, Summary of Cominform article, 28.11.1949; FO371/77591-N10423/10119/38, Suslov speech to the Cominform, 5.12.1949.

government. Here the IRD, the BBC, and other smaller organisations were at the forefront of this new peacetime war. As the Soviet Union concentrated its propaganda more and more on the West, the Northern Department realised that the battle for the support of their own population would be one of the real challenges of the Cold War.

What remained to be debated was how serious the Kremlin took this organisation and its propaganda. Verging often on the hysterical in its appeals to the ‘suppressed workers’ of the world, it seems unlikely that the Soviet leadership took too much notice of it. This, at least, was in the end the consensus within the Northern Department. Mayhew wrote in September 1950, when the Peace Campaign had become an increasingly frantic tool by Communists everywhere, that ‘it would be strange if the kind of nonsense which is purveyed by the Cominform was taken seriously by the undoubtedly able and clever men who form the Politburo.’⁴²⁹ Nevertheless, the Cominform did fulfil an important function within the orbit, even though some historians argue it was inadequate both in foiling the Marshall Plan and enhancing cooperation across the orbit states.⁴³⁰ Conformity was deemed vital to the Kremlin and the Cominform was one tool of achieving it. In usual Soviet style, it was not the only tool. If it was deemed necessary, as it was by early 1948, other tools would complement it to enforce conformity: political terror, suppression by the secret police and the imposition of Soviet communists on satellite governments and armed forces.

6.3. The Peace Campaign

Soviet propaganda had been fairly consistent with regards to its main aims, the disruption of Western European recovery and the frustration of any Western plans for political or military consolidation of its sphere of influence, particularly if this included Germany. But although it mercilessly attacked the West for its alleged hostility towards the Soviet Union and her satellites, for the West’s imperial policies out-with Europe, for ‘ganging up’ on her by forming Western defence coalitions and for planning the next war, it had apparently mainly influenced those already interested in or committed to the Soviet Union. A real

⁴²⁹ FO371/86733-NS1023/40, Mayhew, ‘Must there be war with Russian’, 18.9.1950.

⁴³⁰ S. Dockrill, ‘The Partition of Europe 1947-48: An Overview’ in Varsori, A. & Calandri, E. (eds.), *The Failure of Peace in Europe* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002), p. 267.

publicity coup was needed that would unite these strands and permeate broader sections of society out-with her immediate sphere of influence and that could be repeatedly manipulated to suit various circumstances. The Peace Campaign was to be just that. Although the overall impact may actually have been rather limited, the overwhelming presence of this campaign in the press and the resulting discussions about issues of national security and the probability of war gave it an importance far beyond its propaganda.

The war of nerves between East and West intensified during 1948 when the coup in Czechoslovakia, numerous trials in orbit countries which ended with death sentences and imprisonment for many prominent men, and increased activity in the SBZ in Germany had clarified Soviet intentions. Her new 'empire' was here to stay and the methods of control were being fine-tuned while outstanding issues were being addressed. But while a secure ring of satellites promised improved national security for the Soviet Union, the prospects for influencing and penetrating the West increasingly shrank. The French and Italian Communist Parties had been voted out of the national governments in 1947 while in the West German zones the population proved surprisingly reluctant to embrace any ideas emanating from the East. Increased consolidation of the West of Germany and of the Western European states out-with the UNO, and increased international cooperation in halting Soviet manipulation in the UNO provided the Kremlin with a broad front to attack. The additional very heated debates about the control of atomic energy, allied intervention in Far Eastern affairs and the continuing issue of national self-determination for colonial peoples gave the Soviet Union a highly populist agenda on which to campaign for herself. Peace was the common denominator for all of these.

Although the Peace Campaign is usually referred to as having started in April 1949 in response to plans finalising the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, its first salvo was fired during the previous year. Tiring of Soviet interference in transport links between Berlin and the West German zones President Truman in May 1948 instructed Bedell Smith, American ambassador in Moscow, to make it clear once and for all to the Soviet government that the USA would not withdraw from Berlin. Bedell Smith on May 4th 1948 met Molotov, then the Soviet Foreign Minister, conveyed this message and was persuaded to leave a copy of his memorandum for the record. This proved to be a costly mistake and

started a propaganda war that was quite new in the story of the Cold War so far.⁴³¹ The statement had made American intentions clear not to budge to Soviet pressure but the version of the note released to the Soviet press implied that the USA had made an approach to the Soviet government to settle their differences, over Germany in particular, on a bilateral basis.

This was reminiscent of appeasement and the Northern Department was at a loss over what had apparently happened. Lord Inverchapel, former ambassador to Moscow and now ambassador to Washington, was instructed to seek an appointment with George Marshall, the US Secretary of State, immediately. The major concern was that the USA was implementing a change in foreign policy in which Britain did not play a key role.⁴³² In the absence of any definite US military commitment to Europe the Northern Department was extremely worried. Extraordinarily it seems that officials took Molotov's remarks in the Soviet press and the published document at face value. Actual fear seems to have clouded their initial judgement. After a flurry of telegrams it turned out that American foreign policy doctrine had not in fact changed.⁴³³ Marshall, with Kennan and Bohlen present, had explained the situation and made the Soviet manipulation of events as well as the rather limited confidence of the UK in her American partner rather obvious. Marshall was seriously displeased with this British lack of trust.

While the Soviet propaganda machine milked this episode and the apparent Soviet peace offer for all it was worth, the American administration was forced to engage on a damage limitation exercise. The Kremlin had, quite impressively, shown its superior skills of merging opportunity with the effective manipulation of events.⁴³⁴ That Stalin had made this 'peace' offer to negotiate without a responding move by the Western allies was seen as extremely damaging: the Northern Department stated very clearly that even though 'the object is to ...disorganise the resistance which the Kremlin Cold War tactics have been building up against Soviet expansion ...Stalin's letter cannot be ignored [and] must be

⁴³¹ See Peterson's rather cruel comments in his telegram, FO371/71680-N5525/368/38, 11.5.1948 and FO371/71681-N5936/368/38, 14.5.1948; see also Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*, pp. 184ff.

⁴³² See FO371/71680, FO371/71681, FO371/71682 for the telegrams and papers regarding this issue.

⁴³³ FO371/71680-N5580/368/38, Lord Inverchapel telegram, 11.5.1948; Marshall and Bohlen gave interviews to that effect in Oregon 28.5.1948 and Arizona 26.5.1948 respectively.

⁴³⁴ FO371/71681-N6031/368/38, Lambert note, 21.5.1948; Mackintosh argued that the whole campaign was 'hypocrisy' from the start, *Strategy and Tactics*, p. 64.

dealt with positively.’⁴³⁵ However, the alleged champion of peace had not succeeded in bullying the USA into bilateral negotiations and the major issues thus remained unsolved.

The second phase of the Peace Campaign started in the later winter 1948/early spring of 1949 in response to further Western consolidation with the imminent signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. A successful settlement with the West and/or the delay of this treaty would have scored a victory for the Kremlin which had been left humiliated by the Tito affair, the rejection by the Norwegian government of the offer of a bilateral non-aggression pact and the success of the British and American air forces over the supply of Berlin. On March 31st 1949 the Soviet Union delivered formal notes to the governments of the Brussels powers, the USA and Canada which condemned the planned treaty as aggressive. The West remained firm and the treaty was signed in April 1949. With hindsight Kelly, the new ambassador to Moscow, wrote in November 1949 that the ‘peace campaign certainly made no headway at all commensurate with the efforts put into it.’⁴³⁶ But nevertheless, as the Northern Department realised, it had to be addressed by the West. To stand back in this propaganda war was not really an option which is why the IRD and the BBC among others were placed right at the centre of British plans to fight back.

The emphasis of the Communists to link themselves and their ideology to the preservation of peace was hugely attractive to many so shortly after a major war, but it did not necessarily increase grass-roots support for them. The most disturbing aspect of this whole campaign was that it allowed those involved to continuously talk about war while ostensibly talking about peace. Another was that it harnessed all available Communist or affiliated outlets into it: trade unions, local interest groups, papers and journals, international congresses. The momentum was therefore always kept up and the governments on both sides, in a self-perpetuating development, spend an increasing amount of time trying to deal with it. While the governments arguably knew better than to expect war any minute, the concern among many people was real. To take advantage of this the Kremlin had, as the American chargé d’affaires Foy Kohler put it, planned and

⁴³⁵ FO371/71681-N6006/368/38, Lambert note, 19.5.1948.

⁴³⁶ FO371/77562-N9753/1013/38, Kelly, ‘Quarterly report July- September 1949’, 8.11.1949; shortly after the Kremlin announced the foundation of the Stalin Peace Prize worth 100.000 roubles.

executed a 'war scare' campaign in order to retard Western recovery and frighten the populations.⁴³⁷ The Peace Campaign thus fell on fertile ground.

The discussion in the Northern Department about whether this campaign was outright propaganda or whether it revealed a real Soviet worry about war and a willingness to negotiate to avoid it went on for many months. Brimmell, from the IRD, argued that the 'next war is purely a bogey and thus that the present peace campaign is merely a racket.' Rae, rather unconvinced, retorted that 'such an interpretation seems scarcely to accord with our general practice of finding at least some fire behind Soviet smoke.'⁴³⁸ Violet Connelly of FORD quite rightly pointed out that 'fear of war is certainly being manipulated by the Kremlin...but surely one of the basic reasons for this movement is precisely some fear of war.'⁴³⁹ A month later the Russia Committee concluded that the Peace Campaign had 'emerged as a sustained smoke screen for the scale of Soviet military preparedness and their sacrifice of butter to guns.'⁴⁴⁰ The talk of war will be addressed in a following chapter but it has to be said here that neither side saw a future war as one it could win. In February 1949 the JIB had been 'forced to conclude that Russia's military strength is vastly superior to that of the Commonwealth/ USA.'⁴⁴¹ The Soviet government was equally worried about its prospects in a new war so soon after just having survived another. The massive Soviet propaganda effort and desire to enhance Eastern consolidation by all means short of war was an admission that it too did not perceive war as a viable tactic to get what it wanted.

The Russia Committee in May 1949 discussed the campaign in a paper entitled 'Peace offensive, tactical deviation or change of long term policy.'⁴⁴² Because the Kremlin was seen under the influence of Leninism/ Stalinism to understand politics in military terms it was assumed that the Soviet discussions of tactics and strategies would be fairly accurate. They also agreed that the long term objectives of the Kremlin had not changed. Placing the start of the campaign with the dismissal of Molotov as Minister for Foreign Affairs,

⁴³⁷ FO371/77599-N1344/1023/38, Harrison note on the 'Report on American estimates of Soviet intentions and foreign policy', 4.2.1949.

⁴³⁸ FO371/77591-N10423/10119/38, Rae on Suslov speech to Cominform, 5.12.1949.

⁴³⁹ FO371/77591-N10423/10119/38, Connelly on Suslov speech to Cominform, 5.12.1949.

⁴⁴⁰ FO371/86750-6442, RC, 'Trends of Communist propaganda 1949', 20.1.1950.

⁴⁴¹ FO371/77630-N2281/1102/38, JIB, 'Relative strength Britain, the USA and the USSR', 18.2.1949.

⁴⁴² FO371/77603-N4488/1023/38, RC, 'Peace offensive: tactical deviation or change of long-term policy', 13.5.1949.

alongside the other already mentioned components, the Russia Committee concluded that the Soviet Union, faced with numerous problems elsewhere, was interested in calming relations for the time being. The Peace Campaign was thus possibly a rather poisonous olive branch held out to the West. In August 1949 a FORD paper assessing the campaign concluded that so far its success was rather limited.⁴⁴³

For the Foreign Office it became ever more important to secure a solution to outstanding issues in order to deal with this barrage of propaganda emanating from the Communist movement. It was necessary to calm the nerves of those Western governments which were not involved in top level international diplomacy and therefore rightly worried about their future security, and about what happened behind closed doors when the Great Powers did negotiate. Hankey explained that

so far as Denmark and Norway are concerned, what we need is the right degree of pressure by the Russians to frighten the sheep into the fold. It seems about right now. We do not want that growling of the bear to reach such a pitch that the sheep take panic and scatter into isolation.⁴⁴⁴

Although this was a Great Power talking, his comment revealed the problem of the possibly lacking attractiveness of belonging to a or any bloc. The threat of subversive Fifth Column activity in their respective countries was a valid and potent concern and one which neither Britain, the USA, the UNO nor NATO could do much about. But in the absence of an actual military threat from the Soviet Union or one of its satellites, British hands were essentially tied.

To counter this campaign various ideas were discussed in the Northern Department during these three years: publicity offensives – overtly and covertly, an extension of the work of the IRD, broader use of the BBC, the leaking of information to sources which would use

⁴⁴³ FO371/ 77569-N7491/1017/38, FORD, 'Survey of Communism in Western Europe April-June 1949', 16.8.1949.

⁴⁴⁴ FO371/77610-N1196/1024/38, Hankey note on Peterson telegram, 5.2.1949.

them to educate the public at home. Two ideas were vital: the agreement that hostile propaganda had to be addressed vigorously and immediately, and that the consolidation of the West had to progress, even in the face of continued Soviet opposition to it. In effect the West had to mirror what was happening in the East, consolidation and aggressive propaganda, but with an emphasis on freedom, democracy, economic progress and social equality. The West, suggested General Ian Jacob, then in charge of the BBC's foreign service and member of the Russia Committee, had to come up with a 'positive reply.'⁴⁴⁵

To match the appeal of peace ideas and an apparently progressive ideology it would have to be attractive, emotionally involving and convincing. This emphasis on Positivism had gradually emerged in Northern Department advice in order for British propaganda to be more appealing, persuasive and to get away from the negativity of being seen to be anti-Soviet /anti-Communist. But the British during the spring of 1950 were still at a loss what to offer in return: 'our side still lacks an impelling gospel', an unnamed Foreign Office official noted.⁴⁴⁶ This lack of an appropriate answer made an effective retaliation to the Peace Campaign very difficult. Any good campaign designed to appeal to a broad mass of people had to have a strong central message. In March 1950 Chip Bohlen, the American minister in Paris, plainly stated to a Foreign Office official that

the Russians ...had cornered the market in peace: the peace campaign had not been a great success...but the fact remained that it was the Russians who started it and who had now more or less jockeyed us into a position where we were organising military defensive groups whilst they were innocently concentrating on the pursuit of peace.⁴⁴⁷

That was as near as anyone in the West would go to admitting defeat in this instance of the Cold War. It also demonstrated the overwhelming problems the Foreign Office faced in dealing with the fairly sophisticated propaganda machine of Soviet Communism.

⁴⁴⁵ FO371/77624-N8665/1052/38, RC meeting notes, 27.9.1949.

⁴⁴⁶ FO371/86731-NS1023/17, note by an unidentified official, 29.3.1950; FO371/66374-NS13701/271/38, RC meeting minutes, 23.10.1947.

⁴⁴⁷ FO371/86731-NS1023/17, Russel note of conversation with Chip Bohlen, US minister in Paris, 29.3.1950.

Globally, and worryingly for the Northern Department, 1950 was dominated by two developments. Firstly, the Stockholm Appeal, launched in March 1950 and demanding the control of atomic weapons, proved to be the biggest single initiative within the Peace Campaign.⁴⁴⁸ Although mass saturation of this campaign was not achieved, the outbreak of the Korean War and the threat of the use of atomic weapons revived the campaign later that year. The war in Korea, which had started on June 25th 1950, provided the background to the second important campaign that year. Here was the first hot war of the Cold War at a time when both sides had dug in their heels over their respective positions in Europe.

The Soviet inspired and slowly increasing criticism on the UNO against this background betrayed a more sinister Soviet idea: that the World Peace Congress could be built up to challenge the UNO as the most effective and representative international organisation.⁴⁴⁹ Two articles, in the Cominform journal and the Soviet journal of Soviet State and Law, hinted that this new organisation would be a 'true parliament of the peoples.'⁴⁵⁰ A Foreign Office paper concluded in December 1950 that it was 'clear that the activities of the peace movement are to be characterised more and more by the thought of Signor Nenni's dictum [that] we [the peace movement] have most positively and concretely become the sixth great power.'⁴⁵¹ This suggestion was not only worrying because it could endanger the UNO but also because its call for outright subversion of the post-war international order might prove attractive to those who felt that the UNO was too dominated by the Great Powers and their exclusive Security Council.

A Soviet lecture referred to the UNO in June 1950 as 'a living corpse which no one could look upon as a means for ensuring peace.'⁴⁵² This was probably largely a result of the, unacknowledged, constant manipulation and blocking of the organisation by the Soviet Union. The idea of collective security had turned into a nuisance for the Soviet government. Still, to challenge the UNO, to whose foundation Stalin personally had consented, was a bold act. This was a potentially dangerous proposition. The whole post-

⁴⁴⁸ FO371/86710-NS1023/18, Moscow chancery, 'Fortnightly summary', 11.8.1950.

⁴⁴⁹ FO371/86733-NS1023/49, FO, 'RST', 27.11.1950; FO371/86760-NS1052/99, FO, 'SWWPI Nr. 69', 5.12.1950.

⁴⁵⁰ FO371/86759-NS1052/89, FO, 'SISFP', 6.10.1950.

⁴⁵¹ FO371/86760-NS1052/99, FO, 'SWWPI', 5.12.1950.

⁴⁵² FO371/86767-NS1073/1, Moscow chancery report on Oleshuk lecture, 22.5.1950.

war order had been based on the premise of collective security and multilateral diplomacy. A return to Great Power or bilateral diplomacy would upset not only a multitude of countries but also seriously endanger peace and continued economic recovery.

Many in the Northern Department agreed that the Peace Campaign had formed the most important campaign for Soviet interests since the formation of the Cominform in September 1947.⁴⁵³ It had staged conferences, formed a bureau with permanent staff, issued journals and made numerous declarations and appeals to the people, governments and organisations. Its propaganda, in contrast to its dissemination, was not terribly sophisticated but in its simplicity was appealing to many who wanted nothing more than peace. That it failed had several reasons. While the vocabulary had been adjusted to suit Western ears, its methods had not. In addition, the constant targeting of the British government as a warmonger did not sit well with many who vividly remembered their government's fight against Nazi Germany when no-one else did. Even though economic recovery in Britain was slow, the establishment of the NHS, the nationalisation of some industries and the real sense that much more was to come possibly reduced the potential attractiveness of Communism. Democracy it seems was an achievement that would not be given up lightly.

⁴⁵³ Historians are divided about its effectiveness, Taubman argued it was not very effective, *Stalin's American Policy*, p. 206; while Nogee and Donaldson see it as rather successful, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, p. 108.

Chapter Seven: The ND and Soviet policy in Eastern Europe

[There is now] an aggressive Communist controlled bloc in the East.

Hankey, 1.1. 1948⁴⁵⁴

7.1. The Soviet orbit

The Northern Department reviewed the events of the year and by January 1948 had clarified its position. 'The Soviets', they noted, '[had] ruthlessly consolidated their position in Eastern Europe.'⁴⁵⁵ Eastern Europe in contrast to the West 'shows a uniform and melancholy picture of Communist infiltration, intimidation, gradual domination and finally complete control', Hankey noted in October 1948.⁴⁵⁶ The Kremlin was using Eastern Europe, as the Germans had done, for economic exploitation.⁴⁵⁷ The Eastern European countries had been increasingly tied very closely to the Kremlin, effective control of them had been in nearly all cases achieved, manipulated elections, a ruthless administration and the elimination of opponents had reduced the formerly independent successor states to colourless servants of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵⁸ The Marshall Plan and the Tito dispute had resulted, according to Reynolds, in the Stalinisation of the satellite states.⁴⁵⁹

This bloc had been cemented using 'every form of pressure including undisguised terrorism.'⁴⁶⁰ In one of the most severe assessments to date the Northern Department effectively ended any hope of reaching an agreement with the Kremlin with regards to achieving a status quo in which some spirit of cooperation could still underline the Kremlin doctrine of Peaceful Co-existence. This doctrine would in the immediate future ensure peace in Europe but nothing more. By August 1948 this assessment had been adjusted to

⁴⁵⁴ FO371/71629-N1141/1/38, Hankey paper, 21.1.1948.

⁴⁵⁵ FO371/71629-N1141/1/38, FO, 'Soviet hostility towards Britain', 21.1.48; the RC had already likened this development to 'Nazi Gleichschaltung', FO371/66371-N10279/271/G38, 1.9.1947.

⁴⁵⁶ FO371/71652-N11597/31/38, Hankey, 26.10.1948.

⁴⁵⁷ Judt, *Postwar*, p. 167.

⁴⁵⁸ Andrew's has pointed out the important role the MGB played in the achievement of this, 'Intelligence and International Relations in the early Cold War' in *RIS* 24 (3) (1998), p. 324 ; see also A. Hilger (ed.), *Tod den Spionen* (V & R Unipress, Göttingen, 2006).

⁴⁵⁹ Reynolds, *One World Divisible*, p. 21.

⁴⁶⁰ FO371/71629-N1141/1/38, Hankey, 21.1.1948.

state that a 'military bloc is growing up in Eastern Europe.'⁴⁶¹ This development had, not surprisingly, angered and upset the democratic countries in the West, and had reduced the options for their governments. In geo-strategic terms anyone looking at a map at that time had to be worried. The already extensive territory of the Soviet Union had been bolstered by the bloc on her western border while a potential ally was emerging in China as the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-Shek increasingly struggled to control the Communist forces of Mao in the Chinese civil war. As a result of these developments the Foreign Office, Ann Lane has noted, 'became obsessed by the Marxist fusion of economy and politics' as it seemed now focused on the building of an economic bloc in Eastern Europe to be used for political objectives.⁴⁶² The Northern Department reckoned that the Soviet preponderance in Eastern and South Eastern Europe might not be the last step in Soviet designs for that area. There were strong suggestions that a consolidated bloc, thoroughly infused with Marxist-Leninist doctrine and organised on strictly Soviet lines, might be eventually totally absorbed into the Soviet Union.⁴⁶³

The Czech coup in February 1948 stunned the West and ensured that nearly undivided attention was paid in the Northern Department to developments there and in Moscow. Evidently planned for some time and brutally carried out, it showed increasing Soviet disregards for worldwide opinion.⁴⁶⁴ But the Kremlin had possibly either underestimated the outrage this coup would provoke abroad or simply disregarded any thought about the consequences; presumably judging the benefits to be derived from this course of action more important. Czechoslovakia was of vital importance strategically because it maintained routes of communication to the Soviet occupied zones in Germany and Austria. An overall estimation of events in February 1949 concluded that 'the rape of Czechoslovakia was an outstanding example of Communist conquest by infiltration.'⁴⁶⁵ The setting up of labour camps, reported in October, and of ongoing campaign against big farms confirmed the trend towards Sovietisation of the country.⁴⁶⁶ After Benes's death in

⁴⁶¹ FO371/71638-N8944/14/38, Hankey, 6.8.1948; in June Wallinger noted that the Communist aim was 'to increase the military potential of the orbit', FO371/71651-N7504/31/G38, 28.6.1948.

⁴⁶² A. Lane, 'British Perceptions of the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe, 1947-48' in Varsori, A. & Calandri, E. (eds.), *The Failure of Peace in Europe* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002), p. 327.

⁴⁶³ FO371/71631-N10702/1/G38, FO, 4.10.1948.

⁴⁶⁴ FO371/71649-N2771/31/38, FO, 'RST', 26.2.1948.

⁴⁶⁵ FO371/77566-N1225/1016/38, RC, 'The progress of consolidation of the Soviet orbit in Europe in 1948', 2.2.1949.

⁴⁶⁶ FO371/71652-N11024/317/38, FO, 'RST', 15.10.1948.

1949 the Russia Committee concluded gloomily that ‘so far as can be seen here there is no resistance of any kind.’⁴⁶⁷

Tito’s defiance of Stalin created not surprisingly problems for the building of a coherent Soviet controlled bloc. The resulting mutual abuse increasingly poisoned relations between the orbit states. But more importantly, this struggle brought to the forefront another worrying development for Stalin: nationalist tendencies brought out into the open during and after the war were starting to merge with Communist sentiments creating potentially strong regional forces which might not prove too amenable to Soviet interference. Orthodox Marxists and national Communists, both fighting for control in the post-war governments, could de-stabilise the orbit. This development was, in the eyes of the Northern Department, particularly likely in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.⁴⁶⁸ A few months earlier, discussing the implications of Tito’s expulsion from the Cominform, officials argued that there was the ‘danger of a very serious schism which threatens their [the Soviet Union] whole policy in Eastern Europe...a serious crack has developed in the monolith [and] may possibly widen.’⁴⁶⁹ This, with hindsight, proved an unrealistic hope. As long as the Kremlin was willing to directly intervene in satellite affairs hopes about even partial independence from Moscow remained unfulfilled.

To deal with Tito, national Communism, varying economic difficulties, the ongoing blockade of Berlin, to name just a few of the issues that had to be resolved, the Kremlin resorted, possibly overwhelmed by the complexity of the problems and the geo-strategic extent of them, to tried and tested methods: show trials, secret police terror, the installation of absolute control by the Soviet Union over all aspects of their satellites’ administration, armed forces, economy etc.⁴⁷⁰ In October 1948 the Northern Department had enough evidence to suggest that ‘relations between the Soviet Union and the satellites are uneasy’

⁴⁶⁷ FO371/77566-N1225/1016/38, RC, ‘The progress of consolidation of the Soviet orbit in Europe in 1948’, 2.2.1949.

⁴⁶⁸ FO371/71671-N10231/207/38, FO, ‘SISFP’, 16.9.1948.

⁴⁶⁹ FO371/71671-N8059/207/38, FO, ‘SISFP’, 9.7.1948.

⁴⁷⁰ FO371/77599-N1281/1023/38, FO, ‘SISFP’, 4.2.1949; it was suggested that the decision to arrest Tito was taken by the Cominform, FO371/77599-N834/1023/38; see also FO371/77600-N1698/1023/38, FO, ‘SISFP’, 15.2.1949; FO371/77624-N10886/1052/38, RC, 20.12.1949; FO371/86752-NS1052/30, FO, ‘SISFP’, 18.3.1950; FO371/86717-NS1019/2, FO, ‘Strengthening of Soviet political control in Eastern Europe: Interpretation of the Purges’, 20.3.1950.

and that as a result efforts to further speed up consolidation were accelerated.’⁴⁷¹ So while the process of Sovietisation continued, tensions were growing; ‘in Poland the temperature is rising’, an official minuted the same month.⁴⁷² The Kremlin ruthlessly repressed creativity and ideological idealism in the East, while, as a result, in the West the rosy picture of the Communist paradise in the East was slowly destroyed.

Economic dependencies and quarrels among the satellite states were finally to be sorted out through the new Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), set up in January 1949 in Moscow at a conference attended by representatives of the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.⁴⁷³ The apparent intent was to counter or mirror the Marshall plan and to increase economic cooperation between the orbit states. The precise formal machinery for coordinating Soviet policy in the orbit remained unclear though a permanent secretariat apparently existed in Moscow. The Russia Committee speculated whether this development indicated some form of economic boycott of the West whilst there was also some speculation to whether the bloc could be expanded into a ‘rouble area.’⁴⁷⁴ Though there was information about CMEA meetings across the orbit, the precise agenda or instructions of these remained obscure.⁴⁷⁵ In the absence of any formal organisation to coordinate economic policy throughout the orbit, the setting up of CMEA, representing the governments rather than just the party leaders, was seen by the Russia Committee as potentially closing this gap.⁴⁷⁶ That this in all but name described the consolidation of an actual empire was not lost on the Northern Department. Mayhew demanded that this fact be more prominently emphasised in future British propaganda.⁴⁷⁷

The Northern Department found it difficult to fully understand the reasons behind these Soviet initiatives and to assess their long-term relevance. Why press for developments which would be hugely unpopular and alienate vital support when long-term control would always have to be based on a degree of local acquiescence? Seeing the Soviet Union as largely self-sufficient with regards to food stuffs and raw materials Kelly suggested purely

⁴⁷¹ FO371/71672-N11140/207/38, FO, ‘SISFP’, 14.10.1948.

⁴⁷² FO371/71672-N11785/207/38, FO, ‘SISFP’, 28.10.1948.

⁴⁷³ FO371/86770-NS1103/43, 31.8.1950; the GDR was accepted into CMEA in November 1950.

⁴⁷⁴ FO371/77599-N1281/1023/38, Bevin note on FO brief ‘SISFP’, 4.2.1949.

⁴⁷⁵ FO371/77606-N7902/1023/38, FO, ‘RST’, 25.8.1949.

⁴⁷⁶ FO371/77623-N1388/1052/38, RC, 3.2.1949.

⁴⁷⁷ FO371/86750-NS1052/1, RC, ‘Soviet foreign policy’, 5.1.1950.

political motives behind Soviet economic policy.⁴⁷⁸ Political dependence of the orbit had to be increased while economic dependence was cemented in a number of bilateral trade agreements. However, economically, at least initially, the orbit was a stone around the neck of the Kremlin.⁴⁷⁹ Most of the satellites were agrarian countries with little industry and little proper use of their natural resources. Any development would require substantial capital investment with little immediate returns and Soviet style agrarian reform would wreak havoc in the meantime.⁴⁸⁰ The enforced trade links between orbit and Soviet Union were also artificial and largely untested. Kelly drew two main conclusions from this assessment. Firstly, he re-iterated that political considerations appeared more important to the Kremlin than their economic implications. And secondly, he realised that the Kremlin would need and ask for capital goods which the Soviet Union obviously could not produce herself in sufficient amounts or procure from her satellites. Extending this problem to the orbit states, Kelly warned that if today the bloc was mainly an ideological opponent it may in the future well be 'a bitterly hostile camp'. This issue created a number of problems between the USA and Britain which could not agree on the details of possible economic sanctions. It is fair to say that by this stage economic 'Cold'-warfare had emerged as a tactic available to both East and West. The orbit was in essence lost to the West. All the Foreign Office could do was to increase diplomatic pressure, mainly through the UNO, and to continue with the IRD and BBC propaganda campaigns which exposed Soviet actions in Eastern Europe to the outside world.

Of more immediate concern to the Northern Department was the apparent military consolidation of the orbit with Moscow establishing a more direct foothold over the military forces of her satellites. In November 1949 Konstantin Rokossovskii, Marshal of the Soviet Union and a victim of Stalin's 1937 purge of the Army, was sent to Warsaw as Polish Minister of Defence and Commander in Chief of the Polish armed forces.⁴⁸¹ Rokossovskii was the first high profile imposition of a Soviet official on a nominally independent orbit government and the Northern Department speculated about the real reasons behind this appointment. Essentially there were two: either the Polish government was so confident in its position that it would be able to deal with any anti-Soviet feeling

⁴⁷⁸ FO371/77569-N8019/1017/38, FO note on the correct use of the words 'Communism' and 'Socialism', 27.8.1949.

⁴⁷⁹ FO371/86747-NS1051/22, FO, 'Treatment of Western diplomatic missions in the Soviet orbit', 13.3.1950.

⁴⁸⁰ See, for example, FO371/86759-NS1052/88, 23.9.1950 and FO371/86760-NS1052/96, 20.11.1950.

⁴⁸¹ See report in FO371/77594-N9660/10124/38, 4.11.1949.

triggered by the appointment, or the Polish government was so weak that it had to call on Moscow to send some weighty support. The care taken to deal with Polish affairs and control over it does suggest that Stalin saw the country as a vital part of his empire which, providing the only direct access to the SBZ in Germany, had to be totally loyal. In Bulgaria these developments were mirrored.⁴⁸² Warner argued that the Kremlin, aware of a growing anti-Soviet sentiment in the orbit, was taking direct measures to control it.⁴⁸³ In any case, this further intermeshing of personnel made a direct command structure more likely and efficient while maintaining a close eye of the local Communists could function as an early-warning system for various problems.

The overall plan, the Northern Department suggested, was to 'weld the satellites into an economic union by the coordination of their economic plans in order to increase the economic and war potential of the Soviet bloc.'⁴⁸⁴ Occasional information suggesting the meeting of high-ranking orbit military staff and rumours about a possible Eastern European defence agreement added to the sense of uneasiness.⁴⁸⁵ Even if one could accuse the Foreign Office and the COS by now of suspecting war preparations in most Soviet actions, one has to concede that the British government was in a very difficult position with regards to the Soviet Union and the orbit. The Iron Curtain, far from being a proverbial one only, was a nearly total and very effective news/information blackout that affected a large part of Europe and Asia. Unable to go and look for themselves, decision makers had to rely on sparse information collected by embassies and other government agencies. Little concrete information necessarily led to a more imaginative way of seeing the Soviet Union and, possibly necessarily so, to demands for more decisive policies and actions. Hankey argued in April 1949 that the focus of Soviet actions was still in Europe.⁴⁸⁶ This assessment, not surprisingly, led to further pressure on the Foreign Office to suggest possible action in Europe.

⁴⁸² FO371/86755-NS1052/57, FO, 'SISFP', 3.6.1950.

⁴⁸³ FO371/77624-N9737/1052/38, RC, 8.11.1949.

⁴⁸⁴ FO371/77566-N1225/1016/38, RC, 'The progress of consolidation of the Soviet orbit in Europe in 1948', 2.2.1949.

⁴⁸⁵ FO371/86754-NS1052/41, 14.4.1950.

⁴⁸⁶ FO371/77568-N4711/1017/38, 5.4.1949.

Harrison, in the same memorandum, explained what was at stake: 'Stalin now had at his disposal a monolithic power bloc which can be used in a manner which his power politics and the interests of world revolution may require.' Though not spelt out directly the implication was that the Soviet orbit had now become a fully fledged threat to peace. Effective control had been supplemented by an improved administration, increased coordination and cooperation. Propaganda themes had been established and with them a quite sophisticated network for their dissemination. And while the iron curtain became largely impenetrable from West to East, Communist parties in the West, through the Cominform for example, maintained a direct link between East and West. At the end of 1950 the Northern Department, reviewing budget figures for the satellites, noticed that military expenditure in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria was to increase substantially during 1951.⁴⁸⁷ However, it was agreed that this was a sign of Soviet confidence in its orbit and an indicator of its control over it and that 'no aggressive intent it to be read into this.' This assessment was probably fair. The re-establishment of national forces after war, occupation and consolidation of Soviet influence was to be expected. But an armed Soviet orbit, supporting a still highly militarised Soviet Union, represented a clear danger to the security and interests of Britain and Western Europe. Only two anomalies still prevented this bloc from being totally cohesive: Germany and Yugoslavia.

7.2. Germany, Berlin and the Soviet Occupied Zone (SBZ)

Germany, militarist and aggressive throughout recent history, economically still strong and still possessing a bruised but intact national ego, proved the real challenge with regards to the post-war settlement and post-war diplomacy in central Europe. It, initially, could neither be neutral nor incorporated into either of the two blocs now emerging west of the Rhine and east of the Oder. The non-agreement over Germany's future at Yalta and Potsdam now cost a heavy price as the way of the wartime alliance slowly turned towards the Cold War.⁴⁸⁸ As much as both sides made statements to the contrary, and bearing the haggling over its future during the year in mind, the suspicion remains that both sides realised early on that the country would have to be split in two. By 1946/47 Four Power control was obviously not working and both sides had started to make their own arrangements.

⁴⁸⁷ FO371/86760-NS1052/99, FO, 'SWWPI', 5.12.1950.

⁴⁸⁸ W. Loth, *Die Deutschlandplanung der Sieger* (Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2005); p. 29, 33; E. Calandri, 'Setting the Limits of the Soviet Hegemony in Europe' in Varsori, A. & Calandri, E. (eds.), *The Failure of Peace in Europe* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002), p. 84.

The American and British zones had merged in January 1947, and France joined them soon after. While Britain favoured a federal system, the Soviet Union insisted on a centralised government. In a divided Germany the Kremlin would have lost all influence over policy in the West and could then neither support nor veto specific initiatives.⁴⁸⁹ While the Western occupying powers stopped reparations through dismantling and out of current production very soon and actually economically supported their zones, the Soviet government ordered wave after wave of dismantling raids while East German industry was producing largely for the benefit of the Soviet Union. While in the West a rudimentary system of a democratic local administration was set up, the Soviet government pushed in the East the Communist Party to prominence and turned the SBZ into a 'totalitarian police state.'⁴⁹⁰ The post-war CFMs had not managed to agree on a permanent settlement and so the issues of political control, the army and police, local administrations, supervision of the industrial areas of Saar and Ruhr etc. remained unresolved. Soon it became clear that despite all these problems the German question had to be successfully addressed as the discussion changed from an emphasis on the containment of Germany to that of the Soviet Union.⁴⁹¹ The major European aggressor situated right in the heart of Europe thus became more and more a necessary prize to win rather than an oppressor to hold down.

Berlin, the Foreign Office realised, was likely to cause future problems: control of the capital city of a country symbolised overall control and supreme power. While in the West of the country Soviet influence was minimal, despite huge propaganda efforts by the Kremlin, Soviet control over the SBZ was rapidly increasing. Berlin, sandwiched in between the two, was not only an uneasy compromise but a liability to both sides. Already in January 1948 the *Monthly Review of Soviet Tactics* concluded that: 'it is not unlikely that the Russians will in fact try to force us to withdraw.'⁴⁹² In March the Russia Committee stated that 'the situation in Berlin was likely to come to a head within the next forty eight hours [and] that it had been decided by the Foreign Secretary that the object of our policy was to remain in Berlin.'⁴⁹³ Even if control over the West was secure, Berlin had slowly turned into a major headache for the West; unable to leave but equally unable

⁴⁸⁹ Girault, *The Partition of Europe*, pp. 69ff.

⁴⁹⁰ FO371/71631-N10521/1/38, FORD, 'Anglo-Soviet relations since 1939', 3.9.1948.

⁴⁹¹ Dilks, *Retreat from Power*, introduction.

⁴⁹² FO371/71648-N147/31/38, FO, 'RST', 5.1.1948; see also concerns in FO371/71671-N8813/207/38, 31.3.48; Girault has pointed out that both the intelligence and military services warned about the possibility of a blockade, *The Partition of Europe*, p. 76.

⁴⁹³ FO371/71687-N8167/765/38, RC, 1.4.1948.

to continuously counter the petty administrative warfare of the Soviet organs in the city, the situation continued to deteriorate. In addition, as the Russia Committee worried, the fact that 1948 was an election year in the USA could impact on any American decision that might be required to deter Soviet aggression.⁴⁹⁴

1948 had seen a definite intensification of the Cold War on both sides. The Office of the Military Governor (OMG) in Berlin reported to the Foreign Office in the spring of 1948 that

Soviet tactics in Berlin over the transport question suggest that they are pursuing a deliberate plan of gradual encroachment aimed at undermining our position while at the same time avoiding a direct challenge to ourselves or the Americans which might involve the risk of war. Intensification of the Cold War in Germany has been in fact in progress for some weeks.⁴⁹⁵

Linking local and a more global Soviet foreign policy, the OMG, like the Foreign Office, recognised that opportunities, though present for some time, might only be exploited when overall circumstances were either right or simply demanded it at that time. The OMG report noted that ‘although the main Soviet strategy can be forecast with reasonable confidence, their tactics and timing are much more difficult to estimate.’ The Northern Department was well aware of the fact that one could not look at Soviet foreign policy anywhere without also casting an eye over developments in seemingly unrelated places and that timing for Soviet initiatives was always important. Perhaps not noted clearly at the time, Germany had become the catalyst for an increased East-West antagonism.⁴⁹⁶

In the SBZ by 1947/48 the political process of Sovietisation made progress, although the Kremlin did not appear to have a proper plan with regards to the details.⁴⁹⁷ The SED,

⁴⁹⁴ FO371/71687-N7350/765/38, RC, 10.6.1948.

⁴⁹⁵ FO371/71650-N5091/31/38, OMG, Berlin, ‘Soviet tactics: Germany’, 29.4.1948.

⁴⁹⁶ Mastny, *Russia's Road*, p. 267.

⁴⁹⁷ FO371/71670-N1759/207/38, FO, ‘Soviet foreign policy’, 13.2.1948; Raack, ‘Stalin plans his post-war Germany’, p. 55.

forcibly formed out of SPD and KPD in February 1946, hinted of the SBZ becoming a 'fully fledged satellite power', making the party extremely unpopular among large sections of the population.⁴⁹⁸ Officially, however, in usual Soviet fashion the Kremlin pursued a policy of establishing a People's Democracy; representative of all sections of society and democratically elected.⁴⁹⁹ The Northern Department anticipated that, when and if it would be clear that no agreement between the occupying powers could be reached about the control of a unified Germany, the SBZ would undoubtedly be turned into a Soviet satellite. Officials were equally convinced that the Soviet government would wait until the West had made the first step in this direction to pre-empt any criticism.⁵⁰⁰

In Germany, as elsewhere in the orbit, pressing economic problems required attention and limited the policy choices available. The Northern Department thought that 'Stalin's attitude betrays certain signs of hesitation or lack of confidence in both the political and economic position in the Soviet zone.'⁵⁰¹ It was confident that the Soviet policy of supporting the SED had not been successful and that the economic situation was deteriorating.⁵⁰² Economically the SBZ remained a liability for the Kremlin and proved a real test for Soviet willingness to use whatever means to establish a stranglehold over the country in order to control all important aspects of it. Preparation for the occupation of its zone or, now after several years of peace, the entrenchment of Soviet influence had been inadequate. A lack of funds and of staff familiar with Germany and the Germans, and of staff trained to administer a country that was so different from their own, as well as the initial rampage caused by the dismantling squads and a real lack of ideas of what to do with their zone now that it was clear that they were here to stay, had left the SMAD with a series of unfocused initiatives that had failed to create a cohesive and sustainable momentum for internal developments. This resulted in an application of Soviet ideology and experience to a German state which was not really suitable for it.

⁴⁹⁸ FO371/71651-N8852/31/38, FO, 'RST', 26.7.1948; Loth argued that Stalin was doubtful about whether the GDR would ever be a part of the 'Socialist community of states', *Stalin's unwanted Child* (Macmillan, London, 1998), p. 171.

⁴⁹⁹ FO371/71671-N8815/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 5.8.1948.

⁵⁰⁰ FO371/71672-N11785/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 28.10.1948.

⁵⁰¹ FO371/71671-N9119/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 5.8.1948.

⁵⁰² FO371/71671-N9310/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 17.8.1948.

Politically, the SMAD, as the highest Soviet organ in the East, supported Moscow's plans. When those did not consider future cooperation as a viable means of administration anymore, Marshall Sokolowski on March 22nd, 1948 walked out of the ACC, effectively ending Four Power control of Germany and Berlin. Seeing relations with the West part of a 'war of nerves' the Kremlin was determined to prove that they were not intimidated in the face of growing opposition from them.⁵⁰³ Communication and cooperation between the former allies was thus reduced even further. The dealing with the practical problems of the every day administration of the city became nearly impossible. By August 1948 it seemed to the Northern Department that the Kremlin now considered the partition of Germany inevitable and that consequently the timetable for their plans in the eastern part of it was likely to be brought forward.⁵⁰⁴ These plans were to quite a large extent dependent on the actions of the Western allies who by now had made up their minds: there would be a separate German state in the West and it would, in the future, be part of the Western alliance of states in NATO. In the East, Stalin was still trying to stop the implementation of this plan through propaganda and frequent changes in tactics in his now frosty relations with the West.

The Berlin Blockade, in effect from June 24th, 1948 to May 12th, 1949, was then and now regarded as a pivotal moment in the struggle between East and West and a demonstration of rather aggressive Soviet tactics.⁵⁰⁵ The Cold War contest, as Sean Greenwood has noted, had begun.⁵⁰⁶ Stalin, miscalculating the possible response in his attempt to force his former Allies back to the negotiating table, and willing to increase the political tension in Europe provoked the first crisis of the Cold War.⁵⁰⁷ It forced both sides to face up to reality. The subsequent haggling over the ending of the blockade foreshadowed some of the problems of the later Cold War: both sides, even if determined, could not in all circumstances force the hands of the opponent, and it was very difficult to extricate oneself from a conflict between two violently opposed sides. Realising that the West could not withdraw without losing face and influence in German politics, and confident that Stalin would not push this issue to the brink of war, an airlift was commenced to supply the city from the West. That

⁵⁰³ Holloway, 'Stalin and the Bomb', ch. 4.

⁵⁰⁴ FO371/71671-N8816/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 5.8.1948.

⁵⁰⁵ See Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, pp. 366-376; Roberts, *The Soviet Union in World Politics*, p. 31-32; Zubok claimed it was one of Stalin's probes of the West, *A Failed Empire*, p. 75.

⁵⁰⁶ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 63.

⁵⁰⁷ Roberts, *Stalin's Wars*, p. 355; Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World*, p. 86; Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy*, p. 182.

Stalin, after Bedell Smith's warning, had sanctioned this action is surprising. Here, as in Greece and later Korea, Stalin directly precipitated an American response, with the stationing of US bombers on British soil, that actually contributed to his anxieties about a militarily strong encirclement by capitalist powers.⁵⁰⁸

The blockade was a good example of the desperation of the Soviet government which faced an increasingly successful adversary in the West. The consolidation of West Germany had proceeded rather well and support amongst the population for those developments was quite solid. But a West German state would mean no chance of Soviet influence in or benefits from the industrial heartland of the country. It also meant that a future German state could join an alliance of Western countries or establish a new German army, both highly undesirable developments, without prior consultation with the Soviet Union.

Stalin is strikingly anxious to get the Western allies to desist from establishing a government in West Germany, no doubt because in the long run it is likely to be the best if not the only defence against Communism in the West,

the Northern Department concluded in August 1948.⁵⁰⁹ A month earlier it had been noted that the choice available to the Kremlin was narrow: 'if they are to prevent us from carrying out our objective [Western consolidation and the formation of an independent West German state] ...the Russians must ultimately choose between negotiation and force.'⁵¹⁰ 'It should be said here that the view among recent historians is that the Soviet leadership actually used force to secure negotiations on their terms.'⁵¹¹ It is likely, some of these historians argue, that Stalin really wanted a neutral Germany. To achieve this, he was

⁵⁰⁸ Dobson, *Anglo-American Relations*, ch. 4; Dockrill, 'The Partition of Europe 1947-48', p. 267; Girault, *The Partition of Europe*, p. 82; Peden noted that the British government had to accept these bombers in order to keep the USA committed to the defence of Western Europe, *Arms, Economics and British Strategy*, p. 236.

⁵⁰⁹ FO371/71671-N9119/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 5.8.1948.

⁵¹⁰ FO371/71671-N8059/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 9.7.1948.

⁵¹¹ Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, p. 372; Alan Bullock had argued earlier that Stalin was determined to hold on to Germany, *Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary 1945-1951* (Heinemann, London, 1983), p. 696.

willing to offer a unification of the country. But not all historians agree: for example, Harrison Wagner thinks that both sides considered Germany as too important to give up.⁵¹²

The issues involved were complex. The West was worried about Communist infiltration in their zones, future cooperation from the local minister presidents of the Länder and about a delay in the establishment of a West German state.⁵¹³ It was now three years since the end to the war and a solution to the German question still had to be found or forced. That Stalin saw the foundation of an independent West German state as a threat to Soviet national security was appreciated by the Foreign Office; however, what to do about it and what to offer, if anything, was difficult to decide.⁵¹⁴ This potentially, as the Northern Department acknowledged, could be the long decried situation which would 'prove' that (military) conflict between the two camps really was inevitable.⁵¹⁵

By October the airlift, after initial problems, had proven a resounding success both with regards to the supply of the city and the affections of its population. The bond created at that time was to prove extremely durable for decades to come. Apparently quite satisfied, the Northern Department concluded in August that 'the Russians have not achieved the easy success in Berlin which they evidently anticipated.'⁵¹⁶ When the conflict was taken to the UNO in September the Soviet government denied that there was a blockade in place while the acceptance of any offer to find a solution based on prior Soviet concessions was refused by the Soviet delegation out of hand.⁵¹⁷ Nevertheless, the issue was debated in the Security Council much to the chagrin of Stalin. A month later the Russia Committee mused whether the Kremlin was now waiting for the outcome of the American elections before taking any further steps, even though they were now obviously interested to secure further talks with the Western allies.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹² Loth, *Stalin's unwanted Child*, p. 1 and 138; Roberts agreed, arguing that German neutrality was worth a high price, *The Soviet Union in World Politics*, p. 38; Judt has disagreed, noting that Germany was vital to the Soviet Union, *Postwar*, p. 122; this argument was also made by Raack, 'Stalin plans his post-war Germany', p. 57, 62, 64.

⁵¹³ FO371/71687-N8172/765/38, RC meeting notes, 6.7.1948.

⁵¹⁴ FO371/71672-N10560/207/38, FO, 'SISFP Nr.15', 30.9.1948.

⁵¹⁵ FO371/71672-N10560/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 30.9.1948.

⁵¹⁶ FO371/71671-N9119/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 5.8.1948.

⁵¹⁷ FO371/71672-N11140/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 14.10.1948.

⁵¹⁸ FO371/71672-N12278/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 11.11.1948.

Trying to work out a solution to the outstanding problems in order to end the blockade, the Allies met in Moscow in September 1948. The Foreign Office, even if not actually hopeful, still expected actual negotiation. However, it became clear very soon that Stalin, still, was not ready to compromise on his demand for multilateral control of Germany, the end of plans to form an independent Germany in the West and overall control over Berlin. Apparently feeling that he had nothing to lose, he refused to compromise and 'left for his annual holiday in the South.'⁵¹⁹ While he could supply the East of the city and the West, should his help be asked, the West had no choice but to continue the airlift, at huge expense and, in worsening weather, to substantial risk for the crews. So Stalin simply decided to wait and see. When the city had survived the winter and the fronts had become so hardened as to seriously damage the relations between the former allies to breaking point, Stalin relented. At a meeting in New York in the spring of 1949 he agreed to end the blockade on May 12th; demands for the re-establishment of Four Power control and for a share in the Ruhr were flatly denied by the Western allies.

Situating his offer within the Peace Campaign Stalin ostensibly emerged as a reasonable politician willing to compromise for the greater good. Extensive propaganda to publicise this idea in Europe had, as the Northern Department grasped early on, 'enabled the Soviet government to make, without excessive loss of face, their proposal for the unconditional lifting of the blockade of Berlin.'⁵²⁰ Hankey, thinking about the wider implications noted that 'the Politburo have not abandoned the communising of Europe and particularly Germany, [they have] merely failed to carry it out by assault.'⁵²¹ Harrison, agreeing to this, recorded underneath that the blockade had had a 'harmful effect on the Soviet position in Germany.' Nevertheless, in the longer term he was well aware that Soviet policy was unlikely to change as a result of this episode. The agreement was in the end bought on the promise that trade between the two parts would be re-established and that the CFM would meet once again to discuss a final settlement to the 'German question'. But Stalin had waited too long. On April 4th NATO was founded and on April 8th the three Western allies signed an agreement on the formation of a West German state which would be self-

⁵¹⁹ FO371/71672-N10560/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 30.9.1948.

⁵²⁰ FO371/77603-N4488/1023/38, RC, 'Peace offensive: tactical deviation or change of long-term policy?', 13.5.1949.

⁵²¹ FO371/77612-N4164/1024/38, Hankey note on 'Soviet foreign relations', 10.5.1949.

governing and benefit from the ERP. Elizabeth Barker has noted that after the blockade the priority of British defence planning had moved from the Middle East to Europe.⁵²²

Overall, it was the West not the East that benefited from the blockade. The brutality of it, it was recognised, had crystallised Western opinion and smoothed the way for a separate West German state as well as for the formation of a Western defence alliance in NATO.⁵²³ When the Federal Republic of Germany was formed, West Berlin became a proper enclave within the territory of a hostile power. Its inhabitants now found themselves surrounded by 320.000 Soviet troops and 51.000 German militarised police.⁵²⁴ When in September 1949 the Western commandants finally decided to suspend Four Power talks the writing was on the wall.⁵²⁵ Following the Western lead Stalin gave permission to form the GDR in October 1949. He had little choice but to follow the Western example. What had initially seemed like a good bargain, ready to be exploited at will without too much concern about repercussions, had now turned into an actual responsibility with, momentarily, few actual benefits. While the West had planned and implemented this step in quite considerable detail, the Kremlin appeared over run by events: 'the actual decision seems to have been a very sudden one and the new state has been formed with all the signs of improvisation and haste', the Northern Department noted soon afterwards.⁵²⁶ Four years after the end of the war the Iron Curtain had finally descended completely.

Not unsurprisingly, this situation of a relative diplomatic stalemate in central Europe did not last. On September 19th 1950 the Soviet government handed a note to the Western powers suggesting talks to discuss German rearmament. A further note was delivered on November 3rd advocating a meeting of the Foreign Ministers to discuss the demilitarisation of Germany.⁵²⁷ Developments detrimental to Soviet prestige in the Far East with successes for the West in the Korean War had, not for the first time, triggered Soviet initiatives elsewhere. The Foreign Office admitted that there was a 'perceptible hardening of opinion

⁵²² Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, p. 232.

⁵²³ FO371/77613-N5696/1024/38, FO, 'Soviet foreign policy: Estimate of future Soviet policy as result of Paris CFM meeting', 25.6.1949; Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World*, p. 97.

⁵²⁴ FO371/86760-NS1052/99, FO, 'SWWPI', 5.12.1950.

⁵²⁵ FO371/77607-N8917/1023/38, FO, 'RST', 24.9.1949.

⁵²⁶ FO371/77607-N8945/1023/38, FO, 'SISFP', 12.10.1949.

⁵²⁷ FO371/86759-NS1052/92, FO, 'SISFP', 20.10.1950; FO371/86733-NS1023/49, FO, 'RST', 27.11.1950.

in the FRG against remilitarisation.⁵²⁸ It could not be pushed through against the federal government and certainly not against widespread resistance amongst the population. If done in this way, the Soviet inspired Peace Campaign would have had a field day accusing the West of aggressive intentions in the heart of Europe.

7.3. Yugoslavia

The Yugoslavian problem in Eastern Europe arose just as problems over Germany, and Berlin in particular, were becoming more pronounced. Internal dissent in what had become an increasingly monolithic whole could potentially have had huge consequences for dealing with Germany. When Zhdanov had declared the world to be split into two camps at the Cominform foundation conference there had been no hint that rather than consolidating it this new organisation with its demand for total subordination to Moscow would actually help to split the emerging Eastern Bloc. Strategically, Tito's decision to deny Moscow any influence in foreign policy, defence and internal security matters, was highly significant; it was also wholly unexpected for Stalin.⁵²⁹ Bordering on the Soviet occupied zone of Austria and the contested Italian city of Trieste in the north and Greece in the south, control over Yugoslavia maintained a line of Soviet influence from Rostock at the Baltic Sea to Dubrovnic in the south of the Adriatic Sea.⁵³⁰

Politically, the situation was 'virgin soil'. Neither Marxism nor Leninism had really dealt very much with the matter of several underdeveloped Communist countries in close proximity, all with different histories, cultures and roads to Communism. Shared revolutionary ideals and the common experience of struggle were deemed sufficient to form the basis of close cooperation. The issue of how to deal with two, or more, strong Party leaders who, not even in their own countries very tolerable of criticism and opposition, could emerge as rivals in the interpretation and implementation of Communist doctrine seemingly did not arise. In September 1948 a FORD paper had concluded that 'the fact that the USSR seeks absolute control of the groupings she consents to join, and the extreme tactical flexibility of Soviet foreign policy, make friendship with her extremely

⁵²⁸ FO371/86759-N1952/95, FO, 'SISFP', 4.11.1950.

⁵²⁹ Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, p. 382.

⁵³⁰ For example, D. Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (HarperCollins, London, 1998), p. 132.

precarious.⁵³¹ This assessment applied to both the Eastern European bloc as well as to international organisations. The Foreign Office, not surprisingly, was cautious. Tito supported the civil war in Greece with detrimental results for the West: '[he] can effectively keep Greece in such a state of turmoil that reconstruction is virtually impossible and so far as Greece is concerned the Marshall Plan will fail.'⁵³² Tito also still hankered after the security of the Communist East.

Defiance of Stalin therefore, as the Northern Department realised, did not imply a pro-Western approach and instability in the East could well lead to further problems in the West. But Yugoslavia was not just any orbit state. It was seen by the Foreign Office as 'the leader of the satellites' with an advanced idea of Communism already apparent.⁵³³ Working behind the scenes, the Communist Party had started well before the end of the war to permeate vital areas of the economy, administration and military while initially maintaining the 'fiction of the People's Front.' Not surprisingly, Tito, having achieved victory against the Germans without Soviet help, denied Moscow any say in that control and also, not surprisingly, Stalin did not take kindly to this decision.⁵³⁴ Internal quarrelling within the Eastern bloc between two sovereign countries offered few opportunities of direct intervention by the West and, anyhow, Tito did not make it easy for the West. Even after defying Stalin, he voted with the Eastern Bloc in the UNO and supported Soviet claims in the outstanding settlements in Europe, leaving the Foreign Office struggling to understand what the split meant and why Tito remained faithful to the Soviet camp⁵³⁵ Still, this situation did provide a vital opportunity to learn how the intricate system of Communist parties, personal relationships and specialised support networks, like internal security troops, across Eastern Europe was controlled and enforced.

When in June 1948 Tito openly defied Moscow's request for more control, the Cominform was quick to react. Stalin was testing his ability to actually create a unified front against

⁵³¹ FO371/71631-N10521/1/38, FORD, 'Anglo-Soviet relations since 1939', 3.9.1948.

⁵³² FO371/71648-N1062/31/G38, Peake, Belgrade, 23.1.1948.

⁵³³ FO371/71648-N1062/31/G38, Peake, Belgrade, 23.1.1948.

⁵³⁴ For example, Service, *Comrades*, pp. 251-260; Roberts, *Stalin's Wars*, pp. 348-350; G. Swain, 'The Cominform: Tito's International?' *HJ* 35 (3) (1992), pp. 641-663.

⁵³⁵ See, for example, FO371/71671-N8567/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 21.7.1948.

the capitalist West.⁵³⁶ Usefully in this case, it allowed the Eastern Bloc to portray a united front behind this organisation where there was possibly none. As usually, the attack was played out over several fronts: Tito's apparent turning away from Marxism-Leninism, his identification with the capitalist/imperialist West, the false assumption of the continued existence of a Communist Yugoslavia without the support of the Soviet Union and a veiled call to those in disagreement with Tito's decision to rectify the situation.⁵³⁷ In the West, it appeared initially as a 'family quarrel'; presumably the sheer audacity of an actual attempt to defy Moscow was seen as unlikely.⁵³⁸ However, the situation quickly gained other dimensions. At the end of July Tito had emerged as a 'hero not only to the Yugoslav Communists...but also to all those Yugoslavs who would prefer anything to outright control by Moscow.'⁵³⁹ But Tito by no means offered a democratic version of Communism and the repressions for both workers and peasants as well as a general loss of liberty were well pronounced. The forced implementation of a planned economy coupled with the still only slowly recovering industry and agriculture had left the country in an increasingly difficult economic situation and the attachment of political conditions by the West to requests for economic aid was problematic.⁵⁴⁰

Titos's actions clarified Soviet intentions with regards to Soviet plans for Germany. With regards to control over ideology and the loyalty of Communists outside the Soviet Union there could be no debate and no divergences. The severity of the resulting purges, probably planned to be pushed through anyway but now brought forward, might have been an indication of this. 'Titoism' was not tolerated and, to illustrate this point, the accusation of it was incorporated in some of the trials in the orbit.⁵⁴¹ Direct Western intervention was undesirable. First, Tito had made it clear that Yugoslavia would be Communist, not matter what, and would follow the Soviet Union on the path of fast industrialisation and collectivisation. The support of an openly Communist country was incompatible with British foreign policy intentions. Secondly, a Communist regime not associated with

⁵³⁶ G. Valderit, 'Yugoslavia between the two emerging Blocs: A Reassessment' in Varsori, A. & Calandri, E. (eds.), *The Failure of Peace in Europe* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2002), p. 19.

⁵³⁷ FO371/71651-N7526/31/38, Cominform communiqué, 1.7.1948.

⁵³⁸ FO371/71651-N8294/31/38, Hankey, 16.7.1948.

⁵³⁹ FO371/71651-N8852/31/38, FO, 'RST', 26.7.1948.

⁵⁴⁰ FO371/71638-N8066/14/38, Belgrade Embassy, 'The economic consequences of incorporation into the Soviet orbit', 10.7.1948; FO371/71652-N11024/31/38, FO, 'RST', 15.10.1948; FO371/71672-N11785/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 28.10.1948; FO371/71672-N11140/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 14.10.1948.

⁵⁴¹ FO371/77562-N9753/1013/38, Kelly, 8.11.1949.

Stalinist excesses and criticism, and thus ostensibly offering a better version of Communism, could lead to further interest in and adherence to this idea in the West.

By the spring of 1949 unable to persuade Tito to return into to fold the campaign against him was stepped up: anti-Tito newspapers, the abandonment of Soviet support for Tito's claims on Austrian Carinthia, a cherished Tito interest, and border skirmishes with Bulgaria and Romania increased the pressure on him.⁵⁴² In October 1949 the Soviet Union announced the repudiation of the Soviet-Yugoslav Treaty just as Tass announced that the Soviet Union did possess atomic energy.⁵⁴³ The Soviet Union thus removed all her obligations to Yugoslavia. Diplomatic relations were essentially cut off, the Soviet ambassador was recalled and did not return while the Yugoslav ambassador had been recalled even earlier, but not formally broken off.⁵⁴⁴ Stalin had made it clear that Tito could return only on Soviet terms with no room for manoeuvre.⁵⁴⁵ Increasing instability in the Eastern Bloc was thus coupled with an increased military potential of the major power within it. In addition, it seemed likely that the Kremlin would permit a coup d'état to remove Tito and establish Soviet control over the country.

The usefulness of this development to the Northern Department was only partially clear. The suggestion that the Soviet hold over the Eastern European countries was still tenuous even though accelerated consolidation might have suggested otherwise was an important indicator of overall Soviet strength. That the Kremlin proved unable to persuade Tito to relent while being equally unable to wrest control over the army and security services from him showed that Soviet influence in her satellites, should someone really stand up to Kremlin control, was far from total. With regards to the future, however, the Northern Department well recognised that 'the Kremlin is unlikely to make the same mistake again.'⁵⁴⁶ The Tito heresy, the embassy maintained, was seen by the Politburo 'as a poison capable of infecting the Communist movement throughout the world', though there were

⁵⁴² FO371/77561-N5017/1013/38, Moscow, 'Fortnightly summary', 31.5.1949; FO371/77561-N7556/1013/38, Kelly, 15.8.1949.

⁵⁴³ FO371/77562-N8759/1013/38, Moscow, 'Fortnightly summary', 4.10.1949.

⁵⁴⁴ FO371/77562-N9753/1013/38, Kelly, 'Quarterly report', 8.11.1949.

⁵⁴⁵ FO371/77600-N2131/1023/38, FO, 'SISFP', 1.3.1949.

⁵⁴⁶ FO371/77566-N1225/1016/38, RC, 'The progress of consolidation of the Soviet orbit in Europe in 1948', 2.2.1949.

few sign so far that it had actually done so.⁵⁴⁷ Nationalist tendencies and hints of Nationalist Communism were repressed while the possibility of 'forming a 'fifth' or 'titoist' international' was considered essentially nonexistent.⁵⁴⁸

Tito himself sought contact to the West as some issues were increasingly causing concern to the Yugoslav leadership. The continuous flow of refugees from Bulgaria and Romania streaming into the country, where economic conditions were already deteriorating, was difficult to handle.⁵⁴⁹ By the spring of 1949 there were rumours about military intervention by the Soviet Union or one of other Cominform states against Yugoslavia.⁵⁵⁰ In August that year a Northern Department review concluded that 'we can no longer exclude the possibility that the Kremlin may take more forcible measures against Tito in some form or other at an early date.'⁵⁵¹ This would present the West with a difficult situation: a direct appeal for help by Tito could hardly be ignored, especially if it came through the UNO, while the prospect of war within Europe was as unappealing to all as ever. The Russia Committee, just a few weeks later, took up the issue again and noted that although the Kremlin was unlikely to wage war against Tito, it would continue to apply severe pressure to Yugoslavia.⁵⁵²

In February 1950 Tito told the US ambassador to Yugoslavia that he had information that 'something was brewing for Yugoslavia in the Kremlin kitchen.'⁵⁵³ The Foreign Office remained sceptical of any overt Soviet intervention in internal Yugoslav affairs, partially because it was assumed that the Kremlin was well aware that Tito could defend his country against any attack that was not directly supported by the Red Army and Because Stalin presumably did not want to give ammunition to those who thought that his Peace

⁵⁴⁷ FO371/77594-N9660/10124/38, Nicholls, Moscow, 4.11.1949.

⁵⁴⁸ FO371/77594-N11009/10124/38, Mason, Sofia, 21.12.1949.

⁵⁴⁹ FO371/77588-N5604/10119/38, Peake, Belgrade, 18.6.1949.

⁵⁵⁰ FO371/77601-N2582/1023/38, FO, 'SISFP', 15.3.1949.

⁵⁵¹ FO371/77605-N7842/1023/38, FO, 'SISFP', 30.8.1949.

⁵⁵² FO371/77607-N8931/1023/38, RC, 'Possible development of Yugoslavia', 6.10.1949; in January 1950 a top secret Yugoslav report alleged Soviet plans to attack during the coming spring, FO371/86750-NS1052/6, 21.1.1950.

⁵⁵³ FO371/86750-NS1052/10, FO, 'SISFP', 4.2.1950; it is argued that Stalin intended to have Tito assassinated, Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, p. 206.

Campaign was a fluke by sanctioning Soviet intervention in Yugoslavia.⁵⁵⁴ Still, to support her policy calling for Tito to be removed, the Soviet Union in August 1950 claimed that Yugoslavia, in cooperation with the USA, was about to start a war in the Balkans. With no evidence of troop movements, and against the backdrop of North Korean aggression against South Korea which had started just five weeks earlier, the Northern Department rejected this rightly as propaganda.⁵⁵⁵

Titoism and its possible use in an anti-Soviet Communism campaign remained interesting to the Northern Department. Discussing Anti-Stalinist Communism, the Russia Committee in January 1950 identified Titoism as one of the major strands of it. Unable to use it for its own ends as 'we will kill Titoism if we appear to support it publicly', the Northern Department nevertheless saw it as potentially valuable 'as a useful weapon purely for its disruptive value' in Eastern Europe. In Western Europe, however, they argued 'Titoism could be used as a means of confusing and breaking down Communist loyalties.'⁵⁵⁶ The Russia Committee agreed, seeing Anti-Stalinist Communism as a third alternative between far left-wing Stalinism and more right-wing National Communism.

In the autumn of 1950, reviewing the relations between Britain and the Kremlin since the end of the war, Mayhew argued that

if they were merely pursuing the traditional imperialist Russian policy...they would certainly not have made the crassly stupid errors of policy which have united the non-Communist countries against them, and also lost them Yugoslavia.⁵⁵⁷

Hindsight is a great thing. At the time it was by no means clear that Tito would not work out a deal with the Kremlin or that no-one within Yugoslavia would take matters into their

⁵⁵⁴ FO371/86756-NS1052/67, JIC, 'Implications of the war in Korea on our defence policy in other parts of the world', 30.6.1950.

⁵⁵⁵ FO371/86757-NS1052/78, FO, 'SISFP', 1.8.1950.

⁵⁵⁶ FO371/86750-NS1052/4, RC, 'Anti-Stalinist Communism', 6.1.1950.

⁵⁵⁷ FO371/86733-NS1023/40, Mayhew, 'Must there be war with Russia', 18.9.1950.

own hands and do away with Tito from within. The broader implications with regards to the interpretations and possible forecasting of Soviet foreign policy had been clarified. As much as opportunism and realism were important aspects of Soviet decision-making, the ideological dimension just could not be underestimated. Risking a break with Yugoslavia will all the associated possible implications for the cohesion and strength of the Soviet bloc at a crucial time, the Soviet leadership demonstrated that, as much as changing tactics with regards to ideology and policy were possible, the lack of complete submission and the development of any form of national Communism within her sphere of influence would not be tolerated. The Northern Department as much as Stalin himself had realised that Titoism did offer an alternative between far left wing Communist and far right wing nationalist parties. An alternative meant competition and that meant possibly divided loyalties. In a totalitarian empire choice with regards to loyalty was simply not an option. The problem of the relationship between centre and periphery within the Soviet bloc remained unresolved; with serious consequences after Stalin's death.

Chapter Eight: ND input into FO policy, 1948-1950

In the deadly game of power politics, it is less difficult and dangerous for an expanding power to cease its advance than for a threatened power to retreat.

Mayhew memorandum 'Must there be war with Russia?'⁵⁵⁸

International diplomacy after 1945 had proven simply exhausting. The main areas of contention between the Allies had remained the same: Germany, European recovery, eastern and western consolidation; and the Northern Department thought that even if the next two years would 'see a decisive trial of strength between the two camps', Britain had to remain determined.⁵⁵⁹ The problem, a Northern Department lecture in 1950 stated, was that 'we shall be faced with a problem of entirely new proportions in history, namely the continuation of a period of crisis and tension, of a 'cold war' of indefinite duration.'⁵⁶⁰ To prevent any deterioration, the lecture continued, would prove very difficult. The Soviet Union, seen as powerful as well as fundamentally aggressive, would be increasingly difficult to handle and thus the outlook, in summary, was rather bleak.⁵⁶¹

Despite an actually impressive manoeuvring on Germany, NATO and Western European cooperation, the British government continued to struggle with its new post-war role of a declining power; a fact not necessarily apparent or admitted at the time. Policy makers found it difficult to adapt to the role of a great power with reduced abilities.⁵⁶² Great power status, although much desired, was now tied to the maintenance of close relations with the USA and an increased economic and political coordination within Western Europe and the British Empire and Commonwealth. But a severe lack of funds and of superior technological and military capabilities led to the decline of British influence on the world stage and it has been argued that some of those who believed in Britain's continued role as

⁵⁵⁸ FO371/86733-NS1023/40, Mayhew, 'Must there be war with Russia', 18.9.1950.

⁵⁵⁹ FO371/71670-N3449/207/38, Harrison to Hankey, 12.3.1948.

⁵⁶⁰ FO371/86731-NS1023/3, updated Brimelow lecture to the Joint Services Staff College, 19.1.1950.

⁵⁶¹ FO371/86760-NS1052/102, draft speech for Foreign Secretary, 1.12.1950.

⁵⁶² Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 472.

a world power may actually have welcomed the Cold War.⁵⁶³ One result was a certain ‘pretence and posturing’ in British foreign policy and an emphasis on ‘manipulating the symbols of power.’⁵⁶⁴ Although this could be criticised, it must be acknowledged that the British government and the Foreign Office had limited choices at the time.

8.1. Evaluating Britain’s position in international politics

Working increasingly on the assumption that the spheres of influence in existence would remain unchanged for the foreseeable future, the main focus of British policy returned more directly to issues of collective security and the continued progress of the ERP as the main guarantors of European recovery and Britain’s enduring Great Power role.⁵⁶⁵ This role, the Foreign Office knew, demanded that Britain gave a lead in Western Europe and helped strengthen its democratic forces.⁵⁶⁶ But that was easier said than done. Roberts noted in a memorandum in January 1948 that Soviet policy was ‘now on the offensive everywhere.’⁵⁶⁷ However, war on multiple fronts also offered multiple opportunities for the West. The increasing weakness of Communism in Western Europe could also be exploited.⁵⁶⁸ Hankey noted confidently that if ‘we played our cards right’ the prospect for a Communist victory in Western Europe could be reduced to such an extent as to not make it worthwhile for the Kremlin to even try.⁵⁶⁹ Interestingly, he also admitted that had Britain known what Soviet policy in Europe would really be like, the Potsdam agreement could well have looked very different.⁵⁷⁰

Against the background of a Soviet Union which continued its stated aim of disrupting the ERP and of engineering a revolutionary situation to exploit, the Secretary of State made it clear that bullying by the Kremlin would not be tolerated anymore.⁵⁷¹ It was helpful that

⁵⁶³ Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 90.

⁵⁶⁴ Girault, *The Partition of Europe*, p. 299.

⁵⁶⁵ See, for example, FO371/71687-N13016/765/38, RC, meeting notes, 25.11.1948.

⁵⁶⁶ FO371/71648-N134/31/38, notes of a meeting in Mayhew’s room, 30.12.1947; FO371/71670-N3962/207/38, Peterson, 24.3.1948; the same could not overtly be done for the Eastern European countries as the Red Army under those circumstances was seen as likely to intervene, FO371/77601-N2632/1023/38, Rae, 7.3.1949.

⁵⁶⁷ FO371/71670-N207/207/38, Roberts, 1.1948.

⁵⁶⁸ FO371/71651-N9471/31/38, FORD, 21.7.1948.

⁵⁶⁹ FO371/71670-N1759/207/38, Hankey, 13.2.48; FO371/71670-N5182/207/38, FO, 29.4.1948.

⁵⁷⁰ FO371/71671-N10522/207/38, Hankey lecture to the CCG College Brunswick, 22.9.1948.

⁵⁷¹ FO371/71670-N3962/207/38, Peterson, 24.3.1948; see also notes for the Secretary of State’s speech at Scarborough, FO371/71632C-N6141/2/38, 26.5.1948.

when compared with 1945 Britain could sit back slightly more relaxed. Western consolidation, in the Western Union, the OEEC and NATO, had progressed well and provided much needed security, cooperation and exchange of information. As much as this was a real achievement, however, it was also an admission that Britain could not go it alone anymore.⁵⁷² Unfortunately also, these developments had bypassed the original plan for collective security in the UNO. The future prospects of this organisation were by now seriously questioned.⁵⁷³ The success of Mao and his Communist Party had upset the constellation in the Security Council while the Korean War provided the first instance for the council to act decisively in favour of military action. When Malik, the Soviet representative, returned a few weeks later after having walked out over disagreements regarding the Chinese representative, the damage had been done and confidence in future cooperation between the Great Powers within the Security Council was low. Lingering doubts about Soviet commitment to the organisation remained.⁵⁷⁴ This was a worry as, according to Gaddis, the Soviet Union was the 'only country that combined hostility with capability.'⁵⁷⁵

The two countries maintaining a buffer zone between the two blocs, Germany and Austria, were not surprisingly seen as the most likely areas of conflict.⁵⁷⁶ Undoubtedly, the Foreign Office knew, the Soviet government would see the incorporation of Western Germany into a Western Union as a threat to its national security.⁵⁷⁷ Apart from stopping Western consolidation or acquiescing to Soviet dominance of much of Europe, the Kremlin could not be pacified over this issue. Britain had in essence already acknowledged Soviet preponderance in Eastern Europe; it had had no choice. To deny the obvious in the absence of means to alter this situation would be the opposite of Realpolitik. With this admission came the concession that, just like Britain, the Soviet Union did have legitimate geo-strategic interests and security needs.⁵⁷⁸ The problem was that the Soviet government was largely unwilling to negotiate these. The repercussions of this policy had increased every year and Western consolidation had increased congruently with the heightening conflict. Russian expansionism, viewed variously as aggressive-revolutionary, tsarist

⁵⁷² For example, Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 477.

⁵⁷³ FO371/86709-NS1013/12, Moscow, 'Quarterly Report', 19.5.1950.

⁵⁷⁴ For example, FO371/ 86757-NS1052/78, FO, 'SISFP', 1.8.1950.

⁵⁷⁵ J.L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (OUP, Oxford, 2005), pp. 28ff.

⁵⁷⁶ FO371/71670-N5182/207/38, FO, 29.4.1948.

⁵⁷⁷ FO371/71672-N10560/207/38, FO, 'SISFP', 30.9.1948.

⁵⁷⁸ FO371/77622-N11007/1051/38, PUSD, 'British policy towards Soviet Communism', 28.7.1949; also FO371/ 77624-N8944/1052/38, Hankey, 11.10.1949.

expansionist or plainly militant imperialist, had spread the morally repugnant system of totalitarianism across wide areas. This vast empire presented a considerable and direct threat to Britain's national security and her imperial interests. Adding further potential to this threat, Communist ideology had emerged as a viable and attractive tool for the realisation of Soviet designs. The Russia Committee, rather alarmed about the prospect of a red tidal wave swallowing up Western Europe, argued in 1950 that '[Communism] is now such a threat to peace that we should make use of any force capable of disrupting it.'⁵⁷⁹

A major problem remained the dearth of intelligence to forecast Soviet intentions and assess possible British counter-action.⁵⁸⁰ The implications were obvious: 'crystal gazing', very popular in the Foreign Office, was practiced to an extent that upset some of its staff.⁵⁸¹ Although the Northern Department was mostly correct in its assessments, the inherent danger of this practice was clear. Jebb, concerned about Soviet intentions in the Middle East, demanded in August 1948 that British security and intelligence services be strengthened.⁵⁸² To obtain any information from official sources proved equally difficult. Peterson, British ambassador in Moscow, in early 1948 stated his concern about the nearly complete absence of direct contact with high-ranking Soviet officials.⁵⁸³ The CFM in London in December 1947 had ended on a bitter note and even three months later relations had not recovered. Although desired, *détente*, he suggested, should not be forced; the Foreign Office had to wait until the Kremlin realised that it had overplayed its hand.⁵⁸⁴

At the same time, in the Northern Department, Lambert noted that Bevin agreed that 'the time has not yet come either to warn the Soviet government of the dangers of their present course or to try and work for a *détente*.'⁵⁸⁵ *Détente*, Peterson argued shortly after, could only work if the West felt sufficiently secure.⁵⁸⁶ If the Kremlin was to offer wide-ranging concessions now, the danger was that people in the West, not realising the tactical nature

⁵⁷⁹ FO371/86751-NS1052/13, RC, 'Anti-Stalinist Communism', 11.2.1950.

⁵⁸⁰ FO371/71670-N1759/207/38, Hankey, 13.2.1948.

⁵⁸¹ For example, FO371/71672-N12666/207/38, Hankey, 26.11.1948.

⁵⁸² FO371/71687-N8559/765/38, Jebb, 19.8.1948.

⁵⁸³ FO371/71670-N3962/207/38, Peterson, 25.3.1948.

⁵⁸⁴ FO371/71670-N3910/207/38, Peterson, 25.3.1948.

⁵⁸⁵ FO371/71670-N3962/207/38, Lambert, 24.3.1948.

⁵⁸⁶ FO371/71670-N3962/207/38, Peterson, 24.3.1948.

of this step, would feel reassured and might demand an end to Western consolidation and rearmament.⁵⁸⁷ By late 1949 Kelly, the new British ambassador in Moscow, noted that a 'stabilisation of cold warfare' could be detected, indicating a certain trough between Soviet foreign policy initiatives.⁵⁸⁸ The Berlin blockade had been resolved and Stalin had been left insecure by Tito's continued refusal to bow to Soviet pressure. By the end of 1949 the foundation of the FRG, the GDR and the PRC had all helped stabilise the Cold War further; defined fronts were easier to deal with. However, Anglo-Soviet relations remained uniformly poor.⁵⁸⁹ That both the British and the American ambassadors had been changed in the spring of 1949 had possibly worsened this situation.⁵⁹⁰

The Soviet Union remained Britain's major opponent. Assessing its strengths and weaknesses, the Russian Secretariat in Moscow under Barker noted in a paper in January 1949 that Stalin's Communist dictatorship was now 'solidly entrenched [after having passed] the supreme test [of World War II].'⁵⁹¹ Confident and relatively strong, it was an adversary that would use this strength to secure and extend its position elsewhere to maximise its own security. The Kremlin used militant diplomacy as a weapon to achieve its aims. Britain, in comparison, was much less ruthless. As a result, satisfying outcomes of smaller policy initiatives were not guaranteed. However, this Soviet tactic, unintentionally, helped consolidate the West as country after country realised that only the old idea of 'strength in numbers' would protect them from Soviet interference in their internal affairs through Communist parties, Fifth Column activity or direct pressure. This, in combination with patient firmness, had actually proved very effective in warding off a determined Soviet attempt to infiltrate Western Europe. Even more importantly, a FORD paper argued in March 1949, 'Soviet diplomacy is responsible for the final demise of American isolationism.'⁵⁹² Soviet aggression had achieved what the British alone had been impossible to obtain. This, however, was accompanied by the problem of how to handle

⁵⁸⁷ FO371/71670-N5182/207/38, FO, 29.4.1948.

⁵⁸⁸ FO371/77562-N9753/1013/38, Kelly, 'Quarterly Report of the Soviet Union', 8.11.1949; Communist ideology talked of 'stable capitalism'.

⁵⁸⁹ FO371/86709-NS1013/4, Moscow, 'Quarterly Report', 10.2.1950.

⁵⁹⁰ Sir Kelly for Britain and Admiral Kirk for the USA arrived in the early spring of 1949.

⁵⁹¹ FO371/77560-N705/1013/38, Barker, 13.1.1949.

⁵⁹² FO371/77612-N2255/1024/38, FO, 'The aims and methods of Soviet diplomacy', 4.3.1949.

and influence the new partner.⁵⁹³ The post-war 'special relationship' was thus problematic from the start and even now the debate continues over its usefulness.⁵⁹⁴

Increased coherence in the West led to increased confidence of its governments to claim to offer a good alternative to Soviet controlled Communism.⁵⁹⁵ This point was one of the most vital ones in Western propaganda to its populations: the threat of Soviet interference in the relationship between Western governments and their people had to be countered at all costs.⁵⁹⁶ National policies had to be shaped to support the foreign policy of the government and foreign policy, as Lucas and Morris have noted, was increasingly linked to an effective use of propaganda.⁵⁹⁷ But this took time and a lot of preparation. Coming indirectly to the aid of the West, Mao defeated the Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-Shek in 1949. Increased instability in the Far East with its potential opportunity to increase Soviet influence in the region reduced Soviet pressure on Western Europe momentarily and allowed governments to concentrate more on domestic affairs. The Soviet Union, Barclay, noted in January 1950, 'will not make any fresh move in Western Europe until the issue between Stalin and the Chinese is settled.'⁵⁹⁸

Adapting Kennan's original idea of containment to the new circumstances Acheson, US Secretary of State, had in 1950 introduced his idea of 'situations of strength' which were to provide deterrence for the Soviet Union against any further encroachment of Western interests.⁵⁹⁹ Bohlen, US minister at the Paris embassy, in the spring of 1950, had stated unmistakably that 'the time had manifestly come when everybody must recognise the fact that the world is irretrievably divided in two.'⁶⁰⁰ Containment had been proven difficult to carry out as Soviet tactics varied and as points of Soviet pressure were widespread: these

⁵⁹³ Heuser, 'Covert Action', p. 77; Ovendale, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 42-43; in comparison, Bartlett argued that Britain overestimated the experience of the USA, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 91.

⁵⁹⁴ Saunders, *Losing an Empire*, pp. 44-46, 71; Weiler, 'Britain and the Cold War', p. 134; Charmley, 'Splendid Isolation', p. 144.

⁵⁹⁵ For example, FO371/77612-N2255/1024/38, FO, 'The aims and methods of Soviet diplomacy', 4.3.1949.

⁵⁹⁶ For example, FO371/86710-NS1013/20, Moscow, 'Quarterly Report', 4.9.1950.

⁵⁹⁷ Lucas & Morris, 'A very British Crusade', p. 86; S. Lucas, *Freedom's War: The American Crusade against the Soviet Union 1945-1956* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1999); F. Schumacher, *Kalter Krieg und Propaganda* (WVT, Trier, 2000).

⁵⁹⁸ FO371/86731-NS1023/7, Barclay, 31.1.1950.

⁵⁹⁹ For example, FO371/86761-NS1053/11, RC, 17.3.1950.

⁶⁰⁰ FO371/86731-NS1023/17, FO, 'Evidence of major moves by the Soviet Union in other countries', 29.3.1950.

had by January 1950 been identified as the SBZ, Austria, Greece, Finland, the Middle East and Far East but also included international organisations as points of frequent contact between the blocs.⁶⁰¹ Perimeter defence, as World War II had just proven, was inefficient while strongpoint defence, ie situations of strength, required time to implement.

While the USA was able to function properly, Britain, Western Europe including Western Germany, and Japan were all still in need of reconstruction and unable to support containment independently of the USA. Callaghan nevertheless argues that by 1950 Britain no longer needed Marshall aid.⁶⁰² Although national foreign policies were determined independently, some issues, like containment, essentially based on economic strength, had to be organised in cooperation with other Western states. To rectify the ongoing economic weakness, initiatives like the Schuman Plan were implemented. Bevin's idea of establishing Western Europe as a 'Middle Power' in world politics between the USA and the Soviet Union continued to be discussed against this background.⁶⁰³

Particularly difficult, against this background of relative weakness, was the need to maintain and even increase rearmament. 'The arms race continues with gathering momentum', Mayhew worried in September 1950.⁶⁰⁴ Unremarkably the Kremlin, aware of this Western attempt to restrict its options for future foreign policy initiatives, was not pleased. Both the USA and Britain were dutifully subjected to a new barrage of Soviet propaganda within the ongoing Peace Campaign. Particularly harsh was the continued assessment of Britain as the handmaiden of American imperialism.⁶⁰⁵ The Northern Department realised that Western initiatives had alarmed the Kremlin.⁶⁰⁶ As much as Soviet policies had increased Western consolidation so Western responses to these policies had increased Soviet efforts to protect itself and its gains.⁶⁰⁷ Also, the idea of containment neglected the notion of conflict resolution through high-level talks.⁶⁰⁸ Although the

⁶⁰¹ FO371/86731-NS1023/3, updated Brimelow lecture for the Joint Services Staff College, 19.1.1950.

⁶⁰² Callaghan, *The Labour Party*, p. 189.

⁶⁰³ J. Kent, 'Bevin's Imperialism and Euro-Africa, 1945-1949' in Dockrill, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 66; Callaghan, *The Labour Party*, p. 181.

⁶⁰⁴ FO371/86733-NS1023/40, Mayhew, 'Must there be war with Russia', 18.9.1950.

⁶⁰⁵ For example, FO371/86710-NS1013/20, Moscow, 'Quarterly Report', 4.9.1950.

⁶⁰⁶ FO371/86731-NS1023/8, Nicholls, 'Soviet policy regarding the Western Union', 14.2.1950.

⁶⁰⁷ For example, FO371/71632A-N13824/1/38, FO, 'Draft paper on British policy towards Russia', 12.1948.

⁶⁰⁸ For example, FO371/86735-NS1026/2, FO, 'American-Soviet relations', 31.3.1950.

Kremlin put out feelers for a high-level meeting in 1950, not until 1955, ten years after World War II and well into the Cold War, would the leaders of the Great Powers meet again face to face.⁶⁰⁹

8.2. The risk of war

War, or more specifically the talk of it, took up a lot of the Northern Department's time. The overwhelming presence of the Peace Campaign, the Berlin Blockade, the defeat of the Kuomintang army in China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War a year later, all contributed to a sense of impending doom. Even though the Foreign Office remained convinced, and was with hindsight proven right, that direct war would not break out between the Great Powers, the, however slight, possibility of it could not be neglected.⁶¹⁰ Jebb had warned that 'a mechanised barbarian must never be underestimated if civilisation is to endure.'⁶¹¹ Appraising the foreign policy of a country and its future intentions did include, if relevant, the assessment of its military potential and possible foci of future aggression; undoubtedly the reality of the Cold War did imply a definite threat of conflict. It was impossible, Mayhew argued convincingly in December 1948, 'to draw a distinction in practice between foreign policy on the one hand and Cold War on the other.'⁶¹² It is probably fair to say that the risk of war would have been reduced substantially if the Kremlin had refrained from using this threat in its propaganda, even though Communist ideology maintained that a clash remained a certainty.

Stalin's doctrine of Peaceful Co-existence from 1946, acknowledged by the Northern Department to be a tactic rather than a change of strategy, looked increasingly unconvincing.⁶¹³ The doctrine from the start had a hint of falsity about it; to imply something is possible did not mean that it was considered normal or even desirable. A memorandum by William Barker, head of the Russian Secretariat at the British embassy in Moscow, from March 1948 summed up Northern Department thinking at the time stating that co-existence could not be trusted as this doctrine 'means in practice that war is ultimately inevitable [and that the doctrine was] part of the preparation for the harsher

⁶⁰⁹ FO371/86759-NS1052/92, FO, 'SISFP', 20.10.1950.

⁶¹⁰ For example, FO371/70272-W7836/7836/50, FO, 9.6.1948.

⁶¹¹ FO371/86736-NS1027/1, Jebb lecture to the Imperial Defence College, 24.2.1950.

⁶¹² FO371/70272-W7836/7836/50, Mayhew, 14.12.48, 9.6.1948.

⁶¹³ FO371/77590-N10399/10119/39, Rae note on FO paper 'The Cominform resolutions', 29.11.1949.

probability' of eventual conflict.⁶¹⁴ On the same day Peterson, British ambassador in Moscow, wrote that the 'coming months are likely to see a decisive trial of strength in this phase of the conflict between the Capitalist and Socialist systems.'⁶¹⁵ Only two months before the first endeavour of the Peace Campaign and only three months before the start of the Berlin Blockade, these proved to be quite prophetic words.

The COS in late 1948 made it clear that 'the chances of Britain surviving a war with the Soviet Union waged with weapons of mass destruction would be extremely slight [and] that the danger of such a war will increase after 1956'; they also pointed out that Britain now had to 'wage Cold War.'⁶¹⁶ The JIB, shortly after, agreed: '[we are] forced to conclude that Russia's present military strength is vastly superior to that of the Commonwealth/ USA.'⁶¹⁷ What this assessment was based on is not evident from the documents and thus it is difficult to pass judgement on it. The JIB did, however, point out that the combined economic strength of the Western bloc was much greater than that of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc so that in a longer war the West would prevail; economic supremacy would make its weight felt during a longer war. The date of a potential war was eventually brought forward to 1954. The underlying assumption of the profound British weakness was serious and necessarily had to influence British foreign policy initiatives both to the West and the East.⁶¹⁸ The COS finished by saying that 'the danger [of war] is now so great that all steps short of war should be taken to avert it.'⁶¹⁹

It seemed that desperate times required desperate measures, although war should equally not be provoked. The Northern Department was not impressed but the options were limited: further, and unashamed, military consolidation, accelerated rearmament, pre-emptive action, continued negotiation or the reality of a vastly expanded Soviet Union/ Communist movement which could potentially dictate the terms in world politics. If the

⁶¹⁴ FO371/71670-N3820/207/38, Barker, Russian Secretariat, Moscow Embassy, 24.3.1948.

⁶¹⁵ FO371/71670-N3962/207/38, Peterson letter, 24.3.1948.

⁶¹⁶ FO371/71632A-N13824/1/38, draft paper on 'British policy towards Russia', 12.1948; see 'Review of Defence Problems' quoted in J. Lewis, *Changing Direction: British Military Planning for post-war strategic Defence, 1942-1947* (Sherwood, London, 1988), p. 294, 299; Barker, *The British between the Superpowers*, p. 108.

⁶¹⁷ FO371/77630-N2281/1102/38, JIB, 'Relative strength Britain-USA-Soviet Union 1948-1950', 18.2.1949.

⁶¹⁸ For example, Kelly, 26.9.1950, FO371/86732-5494; RC memo, 23.9.1950, FO371/86762-8288.

⁶¹⁹ FO371/71632A-N13824/1/38, 12.1948.

Foreign Office was just as worried about the war, they appeared more reluctant to admit their fears to the COS, though references about the lack of new information detailing Soviet plans for military action are scattered throughout Northern Department documents.⁶²⁰ Whatever the options the COS, like the Foreign Office, knew that Britain finally had to take a more aggressive stand vis-à-vis the Soviet threat. But Bevin, as the Foreign Office knew, would not make decisions on a whim. He wanted detailed analyses of the pros and cons of any future foreign policy effort.⁶²¹

The widely agreed notion that the Soviet Union would try to achieve her aims 'by all measures short of war' is a good example of the difficulties the Northern Department faced. While the basic idea appeared sound, the detailed implications were much harder to pinpoint. Another problem was that the war of nerves was finally taking its toll. Harrison pointed out in January 1948 that 'it is not only the lunatic fringe that talks of a preventive war [in the USA] since comparatively responsible American politicians are apt, as Balfour says, to over-dramatise the Soviet menace.'⁶²² Rash decisions by scared politicians could well have caused the war that the Soviet Union was apparently waiting for. The British knew that Western consolidation had not progressed far enough to undertake and win such a war.⁶²³ The Russia Committee, not surprisingly, pointed out, again, that the Soviet Union did not want a war.⁶²⁴ A recent high-ranking Czech defector had confirmed that the Soviet Union was momentarily unable to start an offensive war against the West, particularly if it would take her beyond her borders.⁶²⁵ Long lines of communication had proven more than once detrimental to the war effort of even a superior power. Questionable loyalties in the sovietised countries were equally difficult to assess. Nevertheless, a preventive war which the Kremlin might start out of fear was considered a real possibility.⁶²⁶

⁶²⁰ FO371/71670-N3449/207/38, Harrison, 12.3.1948.

⁶²¹ For example, FO371/71632A-N13824/1/38.

⁶²² FO371/71679-N642/368/38, Harrison, 16.1.1948; Lambert noted that that American 'trigger finger' was a worry, same document.

⁶²³ FO371/71687-N8167/765/38, RC, 1.4.1948.

⁶²⁴ FO371/71687-N8168/765/38, RC, 15.4.1948; FO371/77623-N2190/1052/38, RC, 1.3.1949; the JIC agreed, FO371/ 86756-NS1052/67, 30.6.1950.

⁶²⁵ M. Heidrich had been the Secretary General of the Czech Ministry for Foreign Affairs, FO371/ 77600-N1698/1023/38, 15.2.1949.

⁶²⁶ FO371/86762-8288. RC paper, 23.9.1950.

When Harrison noted that 'it was essential to distinguish between the assessment of Soviet military strength or weakness and their capacity for expanding by means of political warfare through Communist parties' he was pointing out the differences between conventional warfare and Cold Warfare. The newness of Cold Warfare, particularly extensive political warfare, made the assessment of Soviet means and measures very difficult. Just as the West was trying to find methods that could be used fairly safely to achieve precise aims, so the Soviet Union was using a trial and error procedure to find out how far it could go unscathed. What the Northern Department was sure about by early 1949 was that it was not going to be distracted too much by supposedly sincere peace offers by the Kremlin. At the height of the Berlin crisis and with potential instability in the Eastern Bloc as a result of Tito's nationalist policies, officials decided that the focus had to remain on speeding up Western consolidation.⁶²⁷ Although the Peace Campaign was in full swing at the time, military consequences to the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in April 1949 were seen as unlikely.

The detonation of a Soviet atomic bomb, however, presented a new and much more potent threat than conventional or Cold Warfare had done to date. Regarded as the main deterrent against an adventurous Soviet foreign policy at the end of the war, it was now in the hands of a rather unpredictable and still inexperienced Superpower. Aldrich argues that it was this rather than the outbreak of the Korean War a year later which prompted a major reconsideration of British policy.⁶²⁸ The atomic monopoly had been broken much sooner than anticipated, and the Soviet Union had proven much more resilient and determined than many had thought.⁶²⁹ A lack of ideas of how to look at the implications of this afresh prompted Hayter, in March 1949, to admit that this matter should be dealt with by the JIC rather than the Northern Department.⁶³⁰ This issue was so secret that there just was not enough information available to the Foreign Office to have any useful discussions about it. Hayter did, however, raise an interesting point: foreshadowing the later MAD controversy he asked if 'the Russians would be sufficiently deterred by the idea of the destruction of an atomic bomb to avoid war even if they thought themselves certain of winning it.' Through rearmament, technological advance and bloc-building on both sides East and West had

⁶²⁷ FO371/77599-N1344/1023/38, Hankey, 4.2.1949.

⁶²⁸ R. Aldrich, 'British Intelligence and the Anglo-American 'special relationship' during the Cold War' *RIS* 2 (3) (July 1998), p. 333.

⁶²⁹ For example, FO371/77624-N8665/1052/38, RC, 27.9.1949.

⁶³⁰ FO371/77601-N2632/1023/38, Hayter, 'Ideological aspects of Soviet foreign policy', 7.3.1949; Hayter was one of the officials in the Foreign Office who thought war likely.

achieved a situation where war could actually have been fought. But increased strength and confidence in its own position also made the Soviet Union more unlikely to risk it all by initiating a military conflict. The Soviet powerbase was restricted to a geo-strategically fairly coherent area in Europe and Asia. In late 1948 there were Soviet forces in Eastern Europe, Finland, the SBZ and Austria, and in Manchuria and Korea. The West, by comparison, had been building up its 'strong point defence' clusters across the continents and along the rim of the Soviet empire.

The permanent suggestion that war was likely increased an already pronounced fear of a possible future war between East and West.⁶³¹ This obsession with war and national security was not new but by using it to promote everything from Fifth Column activity and a Peace Campaign to world revolution, the Kremlin had created a problem for the West by encroaching on its vital interests and issues of national security. A controversial memorandum by the Northern Department, intended as an exercise of 'devil's advocacy' and colloquially named the 'Kremlin memorandum', made the rounds in the Foreign Office in May 1950. It tried to see the world through Soviet eyes and not surprisingly focused on the apparent aggressiveness of Soviet foreign policy.⁶³² It argued that

aggressive acts are often if not always prompted by feelings of weakness and inferiority [and that] Russian policy like that of most countries frequently subjected to invasion has in modern history been peculiarly characterised by this mood of 'defensive aggressiveness' and Marxist philosophy...[it] has so to speak sharpened it at both ends by the dogma of A – inevitable Capitalist hostility to Socialism and B – the corresponding duty of the USSR to promote world revolution.

Rumours about Soviet intentions continued to spread. In a heavily sanitised document dated March 1950, it is alleged that the Soviet Union was planning a large scale military

⁶³¹ J. Mueller, 'Public Expectation of War during the Cold War' *AJPS* 23 (2) (1979), p. 304.

⁶³² FO371/86754-NS1052/48, FORD, 'Foreign policy through the looking glass' (the Kremlin Memorandum), 20.5.1950; see also FO371/86753 and FO371/86766.

move in Europe, possibly in France or Italy.⁶³³ Although this war scare proved to be without basis, any suggestion of impending military manoeuvres within Europe alarmed the British government. The source was seen as reliable by the Americans, who provided this information. But rather than a straightforward military threat, the US was always liable of seeing the implications for other areas as very severe as well. Tired of haggling with the Kremlin in the UNO in particular, an American diplomat was stated to have said that 'attempts to organise the world on a basis involving reliance on the good faith and cooperation of the Russians, such as the UNO, were no longer worth fooling for.'⁶³⁴

For the Foreign Office this was problematic. Even with the Iron curtain down and spheres of influence now plainly signposted, and even with military competition increasing, Britain did not want a total break in relations with the Soviet Union. The UNO remained essentially the only direct point of contact between the countries and thus kept lines of communications open. Face to face contact between diplomats in other areas was much more low key. Mayhew, writing in September that year, pointed out that 'fear and suspicion are constantly increasing between the two sides.'⁶³⁵ A further reduction in communications would only aggravate this situation. Kelly, writing from Moscow, agreed and stuck to his assessment that Stalin would not risk war.⁶³⁶ Jebb, who had worked in the Foreign Office for decades and had seen it through very difficult times before, was much more specific in his assessment. Realising that the time for talk was over and that action was required, he told the Imperial Defence College in a lecture in February 1950 what he thought needed to be done:

The Cold War in this sense can indeed only be conducted if the government as a whole is profoundly convinced of the necessity of combating and resisting Communism and consequently gives the necessary directives...what is required in other words is rather a constant act of will on the part of the politicians than bright ideas on the part of civil servants.⁶³⁷

⁶³³ FO371/86731-NS1023/17, FO, 29.3.1950, many sections in this document are blackened out and, as nearly all markers have been removed such as times and places, it is very difficult to make sense of what remains; also FO371/86754-NS1052/42, RC, 17.4.1950.

⁶³⁴ FO371/86731-NS1023/17, FO, 29.3.1950.

⁶³⁵ FO371/86733-NS1023/40, Mayhew, 'Must there be war with Russia', 18.9.1950.

⁶³⁶ FO371/86732-NS1023/39, Kelly, 26.9.1950.

⁶³⁷ FO371/86736-NS1027/1, Jebb lecture to the IDC, 24.2.1950.

Jebb knew that the Northern Department had done all it could to point the Cabinet in the right direction and that now it was time for the government to use Foreign Office advice and to take the initiative. Five years after the end of World War II he wanted the Labour government to start being tough with the Soviet Union in order to protect the interests of Britain and the democratic West. For those who worried, in his view too much, about possible retaliation by the Kremlin he added that 'if, however, the policy of fear of war is seriously to influence our policy, then we might as well resign ourselves to having no policy at all.' Foreign policy is inherently tricky and repercussion cannot often be predicted very accurately but in difficult times that still did not mean that the gloves had to stay on.

The COS's problems with the Foreign Office were possibly understandable against this background. The essential initial problem was COS unhappiness about what they considered an inefficient machinery to deal with the threat present. Jebb, in a note to Kirkpatrick and Sargent, argued in late 1948 that 'unofficial war having, as they [the COS] would think, already broken out between the Soviet Union and Great Britain' they were interested in having a dedicated planning staff to deal with the Cold War.⁶³⁸ The original Foreign Office minute detailing the complaints of the COS had been discussed over several weeks and Northern Department staff were seriously displeased with Lord Tedder's complaint. Denning wrote bitterly that

if we are to believe Lord Tedder, the COS think that because we have no planning staff as such in the Foreign Office we are so muddled and fuddled in our conduct of international affairs and in any case by nature so defeatist that we are, however unconsciously, fertilising the seeds of the next war. Lord Tedder said that if we did not win the Cold War, the COS would have to fight the hot war and they did not want to.

Mayhew minuted underneath that

they are critical of us because we are not yet fighting this kind of war [without restraints or inhibitions] and because we have not setup the machinery to do it. But neither the Cabinet nor the Foreign Secretary has authorised this kind of Cold War.

⁶³⁸ FO371/ 70272-W7836/7836/50, Jebb, 19.11.1948.

As Jebb made clear shortly after, the Cabinet had to sanction the setting up of a special body dealing with policy discussion and particularly policy implementation.⁶³⁹ The problems were manifold: official authorisation was needed to set up a peacetime version of the PWE, staff had to be seconded, a command structure had to be established, terms of reference to be worked out, and funding had to be found at a time when the Treasury was proving increasingly reluctant to release new money. In actual fact, the Foreign Office had set up a sub-committee to the Russia Committee to discuss specific Cold War issues in late November. At its first meeting the objectives of a possible counter-offensive had been considered: to disaffect the Soviet orbit, to discredit the Soviet regime, to frustrate Soviet efforts, all to be achieved by means short of war and, bearing the JIC estimate of 1956 in mind, rather soon. At a meeting a month later Sargent, Jebb and Makins all agreed that more aggressive policies would indeed necessitate closer cooperation between departments. However, Sargent made it clear that Bevin would never agree to permit defence staff to determine foreign policy.

Eventually all those concerned about war got involved in the discussion. Sir John Slessor, then commandant of the Imperial Defence College, supported the setting up of an inter-departmental committee to deal with the Cold War. But just like Lord Tedder, he lacked intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the Foreign Office and the business of diplomacy. Foreign Office staff were quickly tiring of this interference in their affairs. Even Strang, not one to lose his temper easily, complained to Bevin in March 1949 that 'Sir John Slessor's zeal has I think outrun both his discretion and his knowledge.'⁶⁴⁰ Retaliating against this barrage of criticism and defending their organisation of the Foreign Office, an official wrote in a memorandum to Bevin that 'we are adjusting the organisation of the Foreign Office to respond to the changes in the problems it has to deal with.'⁶⁴¹ With the Russia Committee already in place for several years, the IRD and now the Cold War sub-committee fine-tuning actual planning and possible action to be taken, another new committee was set up to coordinate efforts at the top level of the Foreign Office.⁶⁴² The Permanent Under-Secretary's Committee (PUSC), chaired directly by the Permanent Under-Secretary, was to consider questions of longer-term policies while the Russia

⁶³⁹ FO371/71687-N13016/765/38, Jebb, RC, 25.11.1948.

⁶⁴⁰ FO371/77616-N3358/1051/38, Strang note, 23.3.1949.

⁶⁴¹ FO371/77616-N3358/1051/38, draft paper for the Foreign Secretary, 23.3.1949.

⁶⁴² The setting up of a Communist Information Department was also discussed and approved by the Prime Minister in May 1949, FO371/77617-N4692/1051/38, 'Terms of reference for the new committee on Communism', 12.5.1949.

Committee would focus on short-term and medium-term issues. To pre-empt further criticism and forge closer links between the Foreign Office and the service departments the Foreign Office, in early in 1949, suggested tentatively that the service departments were best educated about the ways of the Foreign Office and the problems and option of diplomacy in the Cold War through the ongoing lectures at the IDC delivered by Foreign Office staff.⁶⁴³

8.3. Rollback

To make sense of all the different strands of ideas of how to interpret and fight the Cold War while trying to determine if changes in Soviet behaviour were caused by actual modifications in Soviet strategies or were just tactical deviations, was exceedingly difficult. The assessment of information and maintenance of an overview of developments in various countries and on several fronts, fell mainly to the Northern Department, and it is here where one is most aware of their crucial job and immense responsibility. The hardening of the Cold War fronts left no room for hesitation. Both the Kremlin and the White House had made their policies clear in stark terms. Beatrice Heuser has argued that from 1948 both Britain and the USA followed a policy of 'rollback' in order to reclaim Eastern Europe for the West although by 1950 it had become clear to the US administration that the Kremlin really was determined to hold on to its orbit states.⁶⁴⁴ Within this discussion of how best to affect change or maintain the status quo the Northern Department was determined to make its voice heard. The Soviet threat could not be countered through small or tentative initiatives; there had to be a confident and pro-active approach. Harrison in this vein noted in January 1948 that 'the gloves are off.'⁶⁴⁵

But it was hard for the British government, now closer tied into and committed to a Western Defence system, to retain an individual voice; policy ideas on both sides of the Atlantic did complement each other but did not overlap on all points.⁶⁴⁶ Geographical separation from the USA was probably an important factor in giving the British

⁶⁴³ FO371/77623-N171/1052/38, RC, 6.1.1949.

⁶⁴⁴ Heuser, 'Covert Action', p. 49; Garson, 'American Foreign Policy', pp. 347ff.

⁶⁴⁵ FO371/71648-N31/31/38, Harrison, 1.1.1948.

⁶⁴⁶ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 59.

government the breathing space it needed to make her own choices.⁶⁴⁷ The choices, however, were somewhat limited; as Mayhew noted in the chapter quote, retreat in diplomacy could be dangerous. Possibly against this background the Northern Department had made it clear that it had become increasingly urgent for the Cabinet to sanction a more pro-active foreign policy. As talk of war continued throughout Whitehall, 'the question of peace or war', as the Foreign Office knew, 'is determined in the last resort by the balances of forces throughout the world, but especially in Europe.'⁶⁴⁸ Despite events on the Korean peninsula, during the late summer of 1950 Western Europe was re-affirmed as the 'key area for the defence of the whole free world.'⁶⁴⁹

In November 1948 Bateman had stated the Foreign Office's ideas of containing the Soviet Union: the strong points along the Soviet perimeter had to be strengthened first, then the Foreign Office had to concentrate on 'exposing, preventing and combating Soviet attempts to penetrate or divide the non-Communist powers.'⁶⁵⁰ Shortly after, the main aim in Europe was stated thus: to 'disaffect the Soviet orbit, loosen the Soviet hold, discredit the Soviet regime, frustrate Soviet efforts.' Europe and, in particular, the increasingly cohesive satellite bloc were to be the immediate focus for counter-action. Just like during World War II it was presumably the idea of a second front which attracted the Foreign Office. To focus British policies on Eastern Europe, thus threatening the Kremlin's hard won empire, would reduce potential Soviet action elsewhere. Tito had done the Foreign Office a favour by exposing the innate weakness of the orbit. The Russia Committee Cold War sub-committee noted that 'we already know that the quasi revolt of one satellite country has had profound psychological effects on the rest.'⁶⁵¹ Possibly underestimating actual political and economic cohesion at the time as well as over-estimating the potential for internal resistance, they had based their points probably more on an idea rather than definite actual potential.

⁶⁴⁷ For example, FO371/71670-N3962/207/38, Peterson, 24.3.1948; FO371/71670-N4057/207/38, Harrison, 1.4.1948.

⁶⁴⁸ FO371/70272-W7836/7836/50, FO, 14.12.1948.

⁶⁴⁹ FO371/86766-NS1072/5, FO, 'Policy towards the Soviet Union', 4.9.1950.

⁶⁵⁰ FO371/71631-N10702/1/38, Bateman to Hankey, 4.10.1948; the strong points were Northern and Western Europe, Greece, Turkey, the Eastern Mediterranean and Persia.

⁶⁵¹ FO371/70272-W7836/7836/50, RC sub-committee report, 24.11.1948.

Nevertheless, the assumption that Soviet strength and prestige was intimately linked to the orbit and would suffer by serious problems within it was sound. History and the British experience had taught the Northern Department that no empire is indestructible even though it might require a sustained effort to destroy it. The Northern Department also knew that an empire would be defended. As a result Britain had to be strong enough to implement and defend its policies, and to offer help and moral support to those on the same side.⁶⁵² The COS's idea to try to undermine the Communist Party's hold over the Soviet Union, for example through covert operations in the Soviet Union, in these circumstances was plainly dangerous.⁶⁵³ The focus thus remained on Eastern Europe, not on the Soviet Union itself.

In December 1948 these ideas were fine-tuned in the Northern Department. In a draft paper the initial foci of future action were suggested as the SBZ, Yugoslavia and Albania. Action was to be mainly political warfare: anti-Soviet propaganda, aggressive publicity (overt and covert), 'the spreading of rumours and the sowing of suspicion among Communists ...bribery...defection and sabotage...encouragement of dissent', in essence those tactics the Kremlin had used with varying success in Western Europe.⁶⁵⁴ The major underlying problem and the one which was to limit British retaliation against Soviet tactics initially very severely was the threat of war. Although Communist ideology and Soviet propaganda both stressed that the Soviet Union was not an offensive country, Dixon had pointed out in April that 'it is true that Russia in history has never yet taken the offensive. But there was a time when Germany was a defensive country.'⁶⁵⁵ The same draft made it clear that 'none of the above suggested measures should be taken if it is thought that it would involve us in a serious risk of hostilities with the Soviet Union.'⁶⁵⁶

The JIB's and COS's assessments that Britain could not win a war with the Soviet Union quickly, if at all, and the severe lack of detailed intelligence assessing Soviet military

⁶⁵² FO371/71631-N10702/1/38, FO, minute for Commonwealth Prime Minister meeting in London, 4.10.1948.

⁶⁵³ FO371/71632A-N13824/1/38, FO draft paper, December 1948.

⁶⁵⁴ FO371/71632A-N13824/1/38, FO draft paper, December 1948.

⁶⁵⁵ FO371/71671-N5284/207/38, Dixon note, 30.4.1948; Dixon also suggested the setting up of a 'western fighting force'.

⁶⁵⁶ FO371/71632A-N13824/1/38, FO draft paper, 12.1948.

strength and preparations had left quite a mark in the Northern Department.⁶⁵⁷ National confidence was based on economic and military strength, and foreign policy was weak if it could not portray that confidence onto the outside world. Dithering would be noted and exploited, and could therefore not be allowed. Doubts had to be dealt with if Britain was to retain its worldwide role. Any smaller country, one with no empire or leadership ambitions, would have not found it so hard to adapt to post-1945 realities. Britain, however, as Wallinger minuted in mid-1948, 'must go over to the offensive so that we do not have to lead from weakness.'⁶⁵⁸ That was easier said than done. In early 1949 a Foreign Office paper noted that Britain still refrained from 'a policy of pure retaliation.'⁶⁵⁹ Patient firmness remained the order of the day.

While the discussion about possible British foreign policy initiatives remained focused on political warfare, other tactics were discussed. Churchill, maverick of British politics, had suggested a showdown with the Kremlin. Surprisingly, the Russia Committee agreed that the idea warranted further discussion.⁶⁶⁰ Tedder and the COS were apparently convinced that something had to be done to prevent the Soviet Union from ever becoming a major threat; preferably before 1957.⁶⁶¹ But, of course, any hint of preventive war could push the Kremlin to initiate the war that no-one wanted.⁶⁶² In the absence of military action, the COS were very keen on re-instituting the political warfare machinery of World War II, thus enabling so-called 'black ops.'⁶⁶³ The Russia Committee then debated the possible three branches of a political warfare organisation: an offensive branch unmasking Communist methods and realities, a defensive branch dealing with hostile propaganda and a 'positive' branch to promote the Western counter model to the Soviet model.⁶⁶⁴

By the end of 1948 the discussion had progressed further: while Western consolidation and recovery had to be speeded up, counter-measures in Eastern Europe were to be initiated.

⁶⁵⁷ FO371/71632A-N13824/1/38, FO draft paper, 12.1948.

⁶⁵⁸ FO371/71650-N5416/31/38, FO, 'The Communist campaign', 10.5.1948; also FO371/71671-N10522/207/38, Hankey lecture notes, 28.9.1948.

⁶⁵⁹ FO371/77612-N2255/1024/38, FO, 'The aims and methods of Soviet diplomacy', 4.3.1949.

⁶⁶⁰ FO371/71687-N1372/765/38, RC, 6.2.1948.

⁶⁶¹ FO371/71687-N13677/765/38, RC, 16.12.1948; the years of a possible future war vary in the documents.

⁶⁶² See Mayhew's concerns about this in 'Must there be war with Russia', FO371/86733-NS1023/40, 18.9.1950.

⁶⁶³ FO371/71648-N134/31/38, minutes of meeting in Mayhew's room, 5.1.1948.

⁶⁶⁴ FO371/71687-N1372/765/38, RC, 6.2.1948.

Since direct action against the Soviet Union would aggravate the Cold War when the West was still relatively weak and unprepared for retaliatory military action, and since direct intervention in Yugoslavia might kill off the still very fragile idea of an independent non-Soviet Communism, Kirkpatrick, in a Russia Committee discussion, suggested Albania.⁶⁶⁵ A civil war could be engineered although there was the danger that UN observers stationed there might find out. Tedder, also present, stressed the importance of letting the Americans know about any such intentions. They, however, were much less keen on sharing information about their intentions. Makins disagreed with the whole idea. The orbit was lost, he argued, and efforts should concentrate on areas that could be won: Berlin, Greece, China and South East Asia. Considering Britain's severe financial difficulties, it was not remarkable that the resulting limitations for possible actions were well acknowledged by all those present. To fight on several geographical and political warfare fronts was just too expensive.

A very interesting and untested idea about dealing with the Soviet threat was discussed in the Foreign Office in the summer of 1949: the appointment of an expert social psychologist to help decipher the personalities and intentions of the Kremlin's residents.⁶⁶⁶ Although enthusiasm among several of the officials was initially rather muted, it was decided to try it out and see if the results would be worthwhile the effort. After weeks of discussion and vetting by MI5, Mayhew contacted Dr. Dicks who promptly told him that he had already been approached by the State Department with a similar request. He had decided to accept that offer though suggested to share, with American acquiescence, the results. The whole debate has a quite comical feel about it although the basic idea of it was very interesting. This was the other side of psychological warfare: to understand the leader meant a better chance of winning the war. The Northern Department was very much aware of this and diligently looked at every piece of information in order to gain more insight into the thinking and dynamics within the Kremlin.

That propaganda, already being distributed low key through the IRD, was to be the main idea for an offensive, was thus understandable. It mirrored what the Agitprop department

⁶⁶⁵ FO371/71687-N13016/765/38, RC, 25.11.1948.

⁶⁶⁶ Discussion in FO files FO371/77618, FO371/77621, FO371/77622, FO371/86747, FO371/86865.

of the Soviet Communist Party had sanctioned over the past few years. The results had proven disruptive, offensive and embarrassing but the actions had not triggered any military retaliation by the West, ergo propaganda was a relatively safe and potent weapon to use. It could also be used to take the Cold War into the Soviet Union itself by attacking its domestic weaknesses: its dictatorship, nationalities problems and class issues.⁶⁶⁷ This tactic entailed its own problems however. When the IRD published the personal account of experiences in the Gulag of a Soviet man without making relevant changes to dates and places, the man was arrested nearly immediately after publication. The Moscow embassy, which had sent the report to the Northern Department in the understanding that it would not be used carelessly, and the Northern Department itself, which had not been informed about the use of it, were outraged.⁶⁶⁸ Mayhew himself, it was noted, had sanctioned the use of it for propaganda purposes.

Tellingly, and pointing out another factor causing British policy to be still hesitant, just a month before Murray, working with Mayhew in the IRD, demanded that no action should be taken which would subject individuals to 'severe repressive measures' in response.⁶⁶⁹ But if there were fears for a retaliatory war or about the prospect of the possible torture or killing of individuals, political warfare would be difficult to carry out effectively. Jebb, aware of these concerns, stuck to his guns. British foreign policy with regards to the Soviet Union had to be carried out more aggressively if it was to have any effect.⁶⁷⁰ Although he pointed out a few months later that the training of agents would require a serious long-term commitment.⁶⁷¹ While bearing the apprehensions of some officials in mind, the idea to initiate a more aggressive foreign policy and tighten up the planning bodies for the execution of it was approved by most senior officials in the Foreign Office and thus became official Foreign Office advice to the Foreign Secretary and the Cabinet.

⁶⁶⁷ FO371/77560-N705/1013/38, FO, 'Examination of the main internal weaknesses of the present regime in the Soviet Union from the standpoint of its long-term durability', 13.1.1949.

⁶⁶⁸ All notes for this are in FO371/77581-N2097/10113/38, ND paper, 'Mr T's account of his experiences in Siberia', 24.2.1949.

⁶⁶⁹ FO371/77615-N103/1051/38, Murray, 4.1.1949.

⁶⁷⁰ FO371/77616-N2454/1051/38, Jebb note on FO draft paper for the Defence Committee, 'British policy towards Russia', 11.2.1949.

⁶⁷¹ FO371/77617-N5232/1051/38, Jebb note on 'Ways of organising resistance in the Soviet Union and other Communist states', 24.1.1949 and 10.6.1949.

Having decided to toughen British propaganda, a disagreement ensued about the initial focus of it. Sargent argued that it should be Western Europe and aim at the eradication of Communism there. The West would thus be strengthened and Britain could then initiate further action in Eastern Europe. Roberts, then Bevin's Principal Private Secretary, conveyed Bevin's ideas as saving Greece, helping Tito and initiating action in Albania.⁶⁷² He thus mirrored the ideas of the Russia Committee and Kirkpatrick from late 1948. This discussion incidentally also provided a good illustration of how long the gestation periods of policy ideas often were. Sargent, however, remained unconvinced. To him it appeared that the Secretary of State was trying to re-create the wartime SOE. The discussion ended with the instruction to discuss details in a special committee. What Bevin had made clear from the start though, was that he wanted the US to know about British plans and possibly to get involved as well; a courtesy not extended to the British with regards to American plans for overt and covert action in Europe.⁶⁷³

A pressing problem was that of constantly changing Soviet tactics. Although recognised as intended to confuse the West and divert attention from Soviet initiatives elsewhere, it had nevertheless to be assessed for potential opportunities these changes might offer. The Cold War, just like a conventional war, was a conflict in flux and even though basic fronts, aims and strategies were unlikely to change, small shifts in focus and tactics could produce some desired results. But shifting emphases made the assessment and planning of longer-term initiatives difficult. The Russia Committee rather stoical pointed out in early 1950 that 'all theories on Soviet policy were only hypotheses and should not be regarded as axioms on which policy could safely be based.'⁶⁷⁴ Trying to think afresh about the main options for British relations with the Soviet Union an unidentified Foreign Office official noted in March 1950 that Britain had three main choices: the Kremlin would do what the British government wanted it to do, the world would stabilise by acknowledgement of its political division or the Cold War would continue with all the associated problems.⁶⁷⁵ The first two were seen as unlikely, the last as the most probable outcome. NSC 68, issued in 1950, clarified American foreign policy parameters and aims, and as a result increased the stakes for the British as well as the Soviets.⁶⁷⁶ Viewing the Cold War through a strongly

⁶⁷² FO371/77616-N2454/1051/38, Roberts note, 11.2.1949.

⁶⁷³ The debate is in FO371/77616-N2454/1051/38, FO paper, 11.2.1949.

⁶⁷⁴ FO371/86761-NS1053/6, RC, 14.2.1950.

⁶⁷⁵ FO371/86731-NS1023/17, FO, 29.3.1950; see also FO371/86748-NS1051/31, FO, 21.4.1950.

⁶⁷⁶ For example, Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, chapter 8; Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand*, pp. 317ff; Gaddis, *The Cold War*, pp. 164ff; Saunders, *Losing an Empire*, pp. 67ff.

ideological lens and placing it in a global context, the procurement of information, its quick analysis and use, and a measured and realistic response from the British side became even more important in order to prevent the US administration pursuing policies regarded as not in the British interest.

Kelly had a suspicion that the Kremlin leaders ‘with their doctrinaire addiction to grandiose planning are working to a broad general timetable.’⁶⁷⁷ To ‘counter-challenge the Soviet championship of a Pax Sovietica’ the West would have to do a lot more in achieving Acheson’s aim to built up ‘situations of strength.’⁶⁷⁸ Bullying of the West by the Kremlin had been essentially stopped by late 1950 but for the bullying of Moscow the West just had not enough leverage or political willpower, yet. Western and Eastern consolidation was continuing, neutral and new countries were being wooed by both sides, an arms race was in progress, political warfare was once again used as a viable political tactic, covert activities were discussed seriously and direct contact between the leaders of the main camp was practically non-existent.

By 1950 the Northern Department had achieved what it had desired since 1946: a more confident and targeted foreign policy and response to the ongoing Soviet propaganda campaign. While the efforts to consolidate the Western fight against the expansion of Soviet Communism had succeeded in the formations of NATO and an independent West Germany, these had largely been high-politics successes. At the grass roots level much more needed to be done to persuade the public in Britain, and elsewhere, that Social Democracy despite its problems, was the best and most viable alternative to Soviet inspired Communism. Thanks to officials in the Foreign Office the knowledge and expertise of Soviet affairs, her strategies and tactics was by now vastly better than they had previously been. Although, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, there is the charge of ‘cold warrior-ism’ against these men, detailed study of the sources suggests that they were in actual fact realists. Access to primary information and experience had given them a better platform from which to assess new information and they were thus often well ahead of

⁶⁷⁷ FO371/86732-NS1023/31, Kelly, 26.9.1950.

⁶⁷⁸ FO371/86748-NS1051/31, FO, 21.4.1950.

others in their discussion of options. In the end, they opted for realistic and pragmatic advice. For this they cannot be blamed.

The testing of each others parameters of interests, for example in Berlin, was not surprising. While diplomacy proved unsuccessful to negotiate outstanding issues, the resorting to a more active approach was to be expected. Britain's response, together with the USA, to forcefully pursue containment was an indication of the level of threat perceived by both governments as well as an indication of new realities of Cold Warfare: a more direct involvement through financial and military means worldwide in order to stop the expansion of Soviet inspired and led Communism.

Part Four. Entrenchment, 1951 to 1953

The Foreign Office, alongside the US State Department and their Western European counterparts, had by 1951 decided on its course and secured the support of the Cabinet. Although there was now a Conservative British government, the broad course of British foreign policy remained essentially unaltered. While Churchill at times proved difficult to handle, the Foreign Office patiently defended their policy proposals. While the West could, relatively speaking, be confident that their plans would come to fruition, the concurrent development in the East centring on the Soviet Union was much slower to get off the ground; the country also was once again plagued by intriguing domestic developments which the Northern Department at times found hard to understand (Chapter Ten). As a result there was a flurry of diplomatic and propaganda activity initiated by the Kremlin to stall Western efforts for increased consolidation and more anti-Soviet propaganda (Chapter Eleven). In its relations with the Kremlin, Western European military consolidation and in particular German rearmament during these three years proved the most controversial and fought over issue (Chapter Twelve).

In the Northern Department these developments were seen with a certain sense of calm in the knowledge that the USA through had made a definite commitment to Europe. Although the British position in world politics was as yet still fairly undetermined, the close relationship with the USA and the continued existence of an empire and Commonwealth as well as its leading role in Europe at the time gave it a political gravitas that brushed over its severe economic problems and the growth of nationalist movements which threatened the integrity of its empire. By now the way information was received, analysed and used had been perfected, and its use by different committees and agencies well established. Some of the main problems since the war had been dealt with if not solved and the focus was much more concentrated. A better focus, more confidence and an increased will to stand their ground meant that the department offered more confident and implementable solutions to present problems. One major diplomatic issue remained: how to determine whether Soviet conciliation moves were genuine, for example after Stalin's death, and whether they were worth jeopardising the special relationship with America in order to take advantage of them.

Chapter Nine: Institutions and personnel: The FO, the ND, and the Moscow Embassy, 1951-1953

It is hard from the ivory tower of this embassy to say how the new [Soviet] policies are being received.

David Kelly, Moscow, 6.4.1951⁶⁷⁹

Of importance for British foreign policy but with surprisingly limited impact for the Foreign Office and the Northern Department itself was the change in the British government in 1951. The well-respected Bevin had died and the Labour government after six years in power was voted out of office and replaced by a new Conservative government. Churchill and Eden (Morrison who had replaced Bevin was himself replaced by Eden after a few months) as Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary respectively took the helm. Eden, Reynolds has remarked, 'returned to the Foreign Office like a man going home.'⁶⁸⁰ Having closely worked together previously during the war this was not a team that required a lot of time to establish a working relationship. Churchill, according to Klaus Larres, thought that the British Empire and the special relationship with the USA would secure the achievement of his foreign political vision.⁶⁸¹ Bullock has argued that Churchill 'romanticized' this relationship while Bevin was much more pragmatic about it.⁶⁸² As before, Churchill attempted to make his mark very quickly. Against the advice of the Foreign Office, and against the preferences of the US State Department, he brought back the old idea of summit diplomacy to negotiate pressing issues. Although forever associated with the war effort of the British people, he was now beyond his prime and difficulties between the Prime Minister, his Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office soon developed.⁶⁸³

⁶⁷⁹ FO371/94805-NS1015/28, Kelly, 'Outline of Soviet Policy for the Re-organisation of the Soviet Countryside', 6.4.1951

⁶⁸⁰ D. Reynolds, *In Command of History* (Penguin, London, 2005), p. 179.

⁶⁸¹ Larres, *Churchill's Cold War*, p. 90.

⁶⁸² Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, p. 80.

⁶⁸³ Hastings, *Finest Years*, p. 423.

The Northern Department took these changes in their stride. Led by the dependable William Strang as Permanent Under-Secretary since 1949, he represented a continuity of organisation and interest that was very useful to officials. First Andrew Noble in 1951 and then Paul Mason from 1952, both experienced officials, supported Northern Department staff as superintending Under-Secretaries through this transition period. The two Heads of Department during these years, Geoffrey Harrison and Henry Arthur Frederick Hohler, were equally experienced staff with an in-depth knowledge of the intricacies of Soviet affairs and diplomacy. H.T. Morgan and K.J. Uffen completed the team as the specialists working at the Soviet desk during this time. All undoubtedly benefited from the knowledge and information accumulated by their predecessors since the end of the war which was now used extensively by the department itself, but also by FORD, the IRD and other Foreign Office departments and government agencies.

The Moscow Embassy in 1951 was still headed by David Kelly who had arrived there in June 1949. On his retirement in October 1951 Alvary Gascoigne succeeded to his post. After extensive service abroad and an ambassadorship to Japan he was sent aged fifty eight to one of the most difficult posts within the Foreign Service. Trying to maintain his dignity vis-à-vis the representatives of the Soviet government who always noticed these things Gascoigne begged the Foreign Office for a new car: 'the Rolls is off the road and in a very bad condition. You know now necessary it is for prestige reasons for the number one to have a really good car.'⁶⁸⁴ A very budget conscious Treasury and the unfavourable exchange rates for diplomatic personnel made the running of the embassy a challenging and expensive task. Ably supported by J.W. Nicholls and then Paul Grey as Ministers at the embassy, Gascoigne led a team of seventeen staff most of which were exchanged during 1951. J.L.B. Titchener and F.A. Warner provided continuous service during the first two years. Additional help and expertise was available from 1953 when the Russian Secretariat was reorganised under the leadership of Thomas Brimelow. Having worked at the Moscow Embassy between 1942 and 1945, and in the Northern Department between 1946 and 1948 he knew the Soviet Union probably better than anyone else in the Foreign Office. In 1956 he became the Head of the Northern Department and ended his Foreign Office career as Permanent Under-Secretary in 1975.

⁶⁸⁴ FO371/94841-NS1051/130, 25.10.1951.

While the Northern Department and the Foreign Office were by now very well organised and ready to receive, analyse and discuss information very quickly, the essential problem of the procurement of credible and up-to-date information remained. The ‘deepening Russian blackout’ had resulted, Kelly admitted, in a ‘large element of speculation in our assessment.’⁶⁸⁵ As Kelly noted in the introductory quote, relations between the Soviet and the British government had cooled and further exacerbated the difficulties faced by British diplomats in Moscow and the Soviet orbit. Travelling in the Soviet Union, although undoubtedly highly beneficial for the understanding of the country, could provide only so much detailed information. Cooperation between the Foreign Office and the Soviet Embassy in London were not much better. The Iron Curtain was hard to penetrate and the Soviet government had perfected its complex system of information control and targeted propaganda. One result was that it remained challenging to suggest and develop appropriate policies for the Cabinet to discuss. Guesswork and a limited information exchange with other friendly governments filled some gaps. Some low key reorganisation of the flow of information continued and concerns about missing important announcements in the Soviet press, for example, were also dealt with.⁶⁸⁶ The PUSC slowly overtook the Russia Committee as the main information and policy coordinating committee. Together with the JIC it was at the forefront of Britain’s Cold War fight against Soviet Communism.⁶⁸⁷

The ongoing Korean War, the continued discussions about the integration of West Germany into the European Defence Community and the difficult sessions in the UNO dealing with the production and control of atomic weapons increased the tension between East and West. A new spy scandal, this time involving the ‘Cambridge Five’ who had held vital posts in the British fight against Soviet controlled Communism, did nothing to aid an easing of that tension. As Max Hastings noted recently, the real danger here was that by that time ‘British intelligence and diplomacy were deeply penetrated’ by these men.⁶⁸⁸ Since Foreign Office and British intelligence efforts were known to the Soviet government, it was difficult to tell how much the British effort so far had been damaged. Nevertheless, the fairly well developed consolidation on both sides had stabilised the Cold War in

⁶⁸⁵ FO371/94845-NS1053/43, Kelly’s last despatch, 20.10.1951.

⁶⁸⁶ FO371/94806-NS1051/34, Connelly, discussion about the reporting from Moscow, 1.3.1951; for a full list of the reports prepared in and out-with the Foreign Office see FO371/94824-NS1021/60.

⁶⁸⁷ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 71.

⁶⁸⁸ *The Sunday Times*, Culture section, book review, 11.10.2009.

Europe. Clearly drawn battle lines meant that a war between the two sides was less likely and this resulted in a reduction in the talk of war.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁹ FO371/94808-NS1015/68, Hohler, 13.9.1951.

Chapter Ten: The ND view of the Soviet Union, Soviet foreign policy, and the likely succession to Stalin

These [Soviet leaders] are hard-boiled fanatics.

David Kelly, 5.7.1951⁶⁹⁰

The last two years of Stalin's life were defined by several important events: the Nineteenth party Congress in October 1952, the long delayed second post-war (Fifth) Five Year Plan, and the preparation and partial carrying out of new purges. The Party Congress confirmed and increased domestic coherence while personnel changes in party and bureaucracy cemented the Stalinist system.⁶⁹¹ Stalin, as Roberts Service has argued, was still a threat to his fellow party members.⁶⁹² By the time of his death on March 5th, 1953 the complete Communist Party hold on the country had been re-established after the upheavals of the war and post-war period.⁶⁹³ The famous grandiose schemes of Soviet engineers and architects fired the public imagination and convinced many in the West that the Soviet Union would only grow stronger.⁶⁹⁴ This increased concern in those who knew that increasing industrial strength would necessarily come with a more confident approach to the solution of internal and external problems. Stalin himself, the Northern Department agreed, retained his absolute control of the country, a claim now questioned by some historians.⁶⁹⁵

The Soviet population had by now recovered from its wartime losses and stood at about 203 million, 39.2 million of whom were industrial workers.⁶⁹⁶ Tony Judt estimates that in 1952 about 5.2 million were held in labour camps, labour colonies or special

⁶⁹⁰ FO371/94850-NS1073/15.

⁶⁹¹ FO371/100826-NS1023/26, Gascoigne, 30.8.1952; Grey argued that the Soviet government only now had finished its reassessment of the changed international situation after WWII, FO371/100831-NS1026/32, 'Survey of the international implications of the proceedings of the XIXth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', 23.10.52; Gorlizki & Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, p. 152; Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 327.

⁶⁹² Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, p. 327.

⁶⁹³ Gorlizki & Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace*, p. 12 and 170.

⁶⁹⁴ FO371/94800-NS1013/1, Moscow Embassy, 'Quarterly report', 1.1.1951; it was known that many of these projects used forced labour.

⁶⁹⁵ Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, p. 147; Knight, *Beria*, pp. 166ff and pp. 172ff.

⁶⁹⁶ FO371/94852-NS1101/2, EID paper, 'Monthly economic report for February and March 1951', 27.3.1951.

settlements.⁶⁹⁷ But the reality of living in a totalitarian country may well have been less worrying for Soviet citizens at the time than many in the West thought. Embassy staff travelling the country in 1951 reported back saying that ‘the fact of living in a police state is merely an accepted background to normal life; it strengthens the desire to keep ‘out of trouble’ but is not felt as an oppression from which other happier races are free.’⁶⁹⁸ Gascoigne, the new ambassador, wrote in his first letter that ‘while the people look adequately clad, they do not look happy...I get the impression that it is one of the gloomiest and saddest cities I have ever seen. The people all seem to be in mourning.’⁶⁹⁹ Though deeply pessimistic this assessment reflected the views of the Foreign Office.

The big news at the beginning of 1953 was the announcement of a wave of new arrests. Frequent purges and re-organisation in the bureaucracy, Party and local government bodies were nothing unusual. In 1951 a Northern Department official had noted that ‘this is a recurrent disease of the Communist mind and I do not think we should attach any great significance to the present campaign.’⁷⁰⁰ Arrests in the 1930s had served domestic as well as foreign policy purposes and the new purges were deemed to be a completely internal affair; possibly a sort of Soviet house cleaning.⁷⁰¹ This time a group of Jewish doctors, among them very prominent Kremlin doctors like Vinogradov and Egorov, were accused of planning terrorist activities in the instructions of Western, in particular British and American, intelligence services.⁷⁰² In 1953 after months of silence and expectations of a new show trial, the new leaders announced soon after Stalin’s death that the men had been wrongfully arrested by the Ministry of State Security.⁷⁰³ How far Beria himself was implicated and how much this affair aided his subsequent fall remains unclear. Amy Knight proposed that it may have been Khrushchev, who disliked Beria, who was behind this plot to discredit the security services.⁷⁰⁴ The Moscow embassy noted, slightly at a loss, that ‘the doctor’s plot remains a curious episode.’⁷⁰⁵

⁶⁹⁷ Judt, *Postwar*, p. 191.

⁶⁹⁸ FO371/94908-NS1632/13, Kelly, ‘Impressions of life in the Soviet Union’, 11.4.1951; also FO371/94808-NS1015/68, Peck note, 13.9.1951.

⁶⁹⁹ FO371/94808-NS1015/83, Gascoigne, ‘First impressions of Moscow’, 5.12.1951.

⁷⁰⁰ FO371/94802-NS1013/19, Uffen comment on ‘Fortnightly Summary’, 11.7.1951.

⁷⁰¹ FO371/106513-NS1017/1, Hohler note, 13.1.1953.

⁷⁰² FO371/106504-NS1013/4, Moscow, ‘Soviet Union weekly summary’, 16.1.1953; J. Brent & V.P. Naumov, *Stalin’s last Crime: The Doctor’s Plot* (John Murray, London, 2003); Zubkova, *Russia after the War*, pp. 135-137.

⁷⁰³ FO371/106504-0146, Soviet Union weekly summary, 9.4.1953.

⁷⁰⁴ Knight, *Beria*, p. 173.

⁷⁰⁵ FO371/106504-NS1013/19, Moscow, ‘Soviet Union quarterly report’, 8.4.1953.

Despite the developments since 1945 and the possible realisation that he had a part to play in the cooling of relations between the erstwhile allies, Stalin was orthodox with regards to his world view. While he was willing to alter some strategies as well as tactics, his basic assumptions remained the same. Undoubtedly, Roberts has argued, the Soviet leadership believed in its own ideology.⁷⁰⁶ But Stalin's attempt to view the post-war world through the prism of Marxism-Leninism, while providing him with explanations and opportunities, weakened his understanding of the changing international scene.⁷⁰⁷ Nevertheless, 'dogmatism was one of the most important pillars of Stalinism.'⁷⁰⁸ As new necessities merged with old certainties the export of the revolutionary movement into those areas deemed susceptible to it remained, apart from domestic and military strength, the main line of the defence of the Soviet Union.⁷⁰⁹ The problem for the Kremlin was how to reconcile the massive capital investment programme needed to achieve the basics of Communism while rearming at the same time and the Soviet government was undoubtedly aware of this huge problem at the heart of its domestic and international policy.

When the staple of Soviet propaganda, the imminent economic slump in the capitalist countries, proved to take longer than anticipated and thus less useful as a threat, the focus shifted towards the impact of rearmament on workers lives in the West.⁷¹⁰ The new mode of attack included frequent claims that Western aggressive policies were the source of the international tension and that therefore war in the future was likely.⁷¹¹ Soviet policy, the Northern Department argued, could not hope to attain its foreign policy aims with regards to the spread of Communism by inter-governmental practices. Therefore it was entirely dependent on grass roots support abroad. The moral high-ground was therefore important and the Kremlin worked hard to give the impression of occupying it alone. High-level diplomacy was designed to divert attention away from these efforts and to optimise the ground as much as possible while maintaining peace. To hope for any significant conciliatory moves, Gascoigne argued, was pointless.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁶ FO371/94823-NS1021/52, Roberts paper, 31.5.1951.

⁷⁰⁷ For example, FO371/106504-NS1013/3, Gascoigne, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 1.1.1953.

⁷⁰⁸ Volkogonov, *Stalin*, p. 552.

⁷⁰⁹ FO371/94824-NS1021/55, Kelly, 'Soviet foreign policy', 20.7.1951; see FO371/94848-NS1071/4 for a Moscow Chancery letter on a Soviet article on 'The role of the masses in the defence of peace', 6.6.1951; FO371/100836-NS10345/19, Dixon note on FO paper 'Soviet propaganda against the Western powers', 10.6.1952.

⁷¹⁰ FO371/94801-NS1013/10, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', , 20.3.1951.

⁷¹¹ FO371/94829-NS1024/7, 'RST', 29.6.1951; FO371/94829-1856, 'RST', 1.1.1952.

⁷¹² FO371/100830-NS1026/3, Uffen note on Gascoigne letter, 5.3.1952; FO371/100831-NS1026/32, Grey, 'Survey of the international implications of the proceedings of the 19th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', 23.10.1952.

The Soviet bloc far from being a finished product remained very much a work in progress while, apart from Germany, the Korean War was item number one on the negotiation list.⁷¹³ Soviet intentions were still unclear and Nicholls wrote from Moscow that ‘the Korean campaign was more a limited exercise and one within the general strategy of plucking ripe plums where no great risk was involved, but there could be no certainty that the Politburo did not intend it as the opening shot of a general offensive.’⁷¹⁴ Kelly argued a few months later that ‘the inability of the Soviet government to resist the temptation of an apparently easy prize in Korea was a turning point’ in Soviet policy.⁷¹⁵ It had made a mistake that was now difficult to rectify. Dixon argued therefore not surprisingly that the next time the Kremlin might be more careful with regards to any foreign adventures.⁷¹⁶ Accordingly, Soviet confidence and propaganda wavered with military fortunes in Korea. When making progress the Soviet Union blocked all attempts to secure a cease fire. By late 1951 it was clear that the Korean War was a liability to all sides. The main problem was that China appeared to be in charge of negotiations and the realisation of all Chinese desiderata for negotiation appeared impossible.

A long memorandum in July 1951 summarised the British consensus about the aims of Soviet foreign policy.⁷¹⁷ The Soviet foreign policy in Europe was characterised as nationalist imperialism aimed at the realisation of a Communist world order.⁷¹⁸ Germany remained the key to success in Europe.⁷¹⁹ The Kremlin would try to defeat both Western European recovery and Western consolidation of any kind. American and British influence in Eastern and Western Europe was to be eradicated. In order to achieve these it would use all methods of Cold Warfare.⁷²⁰ Since Soviet leaders did not have to pay attention to domestic pressures and thought that concern among foreign Communists and non-Communists alike was being dealt with adequately through the Peace Campaign it was able to follow its foreign policy objectives fairly consistently. Although the West should

⁷¹³ FO371/94801-NS1013/10, ‘Soviet Union quarterly report’, 20.3.1951; FO371/94825-NS1021/74, lecture for the Joint Services Staff College, ‘Basic Facts of Soviet policy’, 6.10.1951.

⁷¹⁴ FO371/94800-NS1013/1, Nicholls, ‘Soviet Union quarterly report’, 1.1.1951.

⁷¹⁵ FO371/94824-NS1021/55, Kelly, 20.7.1951.

⁷¹⁶ FO371/94843-NS1053/17, RC, 16.3.1951; Dixon noted that it was ‘certainly a cardinal principle of Russian policy to get others to do the fighting for them’, FO371/94845-NS1053/35, RC notes, 23.8.1951.

⁷¹⁷ FO371/94815-NS10114/19, FO, ‘Soviet foreign policy: Brief for the UK deputy to the North Atlantic Council of Deputies’, 3.7.1951; also FO371/94842-NS1053/2, ‘Proposed telegram for Four Power talks’, RC, 2.1.1951.

⁷¹⁸ FO371/94844-NS1053/25, RC, 7.5.1951; the Northern Department noted that ‘Soviet policy might be called Marxism harnessed to the service of Russian Imperialism’, FO371/100847-7088, Brief for the UK deputy to the North Atlantic Council of Deputies, 21.2.1952.

⁷¹⁹ FO371/94821-NS1021/25, ‘SWWPI’, 1.3.1951.

⁷²⁰ Roberts had argued two months prior to this that according to the Soviet attitude ‘the ends justify the means and no faith need be kept with non-Marxist infidels’, FO371/94823-NS1021/52, 31.5.1951.

not appear weak it had to refrain from appearing too threatening. Backed into a corner it was impossible to say what the Kremlin might do. Not surprisingly, Gascoigne warned from Moscow that 'the Soviet Union would fight rather than yield on any point which threatened sovereignty, either of Soviet territory, or of the territory of their satellites.'⁷²¹

Stalin's death in March 1953 was a turning point: the end of an era and the chance for an easing of the Cold War. Although the new leaders would have to negotiate about the form of government and ensure the domestic stability of the country, and therefore were unlikely to make wide-ranging concessions quickly, smaller steps could well lead to bigger gestures.⁷²² The embassy confidently declared that there were signs that the new leaders were keen to dissociate themselves from particular tactics of their predecessor and soon detected a moderate disengagement internationally.⁷²³ Some in the Air Ministry even wondered, in view of the continued calm and business as usual mentality, whether the new leaders 'were working to a pre-arranged plan.'⁷²⁴ While toning down the severe anti-Western content of their propaganda and expressing their desire for peace they maintained that the Soviet Union would continue to strengthen herself. The Northern Department thought that this reduction in aggressiveness was essentially due to a real fear in the Kremlin about what the West, and in particular the USA, might do.⁷²⁵ Many remembered the intervention after the revolution in admittedly different circumstances but nevertheless this idea was not entirely illusory. The back door had been opened and no one was quite sure of what to do next.

By the summer this very fleeting *détente* was essentially over. It had lasted only as long as the new leaders needed to secure their own positions. The unrest in GDR in the summer of 1953 was dealt with in typical Soviet manner – decisively and ruthlessly. However, a 'new look' was being portrayed across the orbit: for example, in a tactical withdrawal the Soviet style collectivisation campaign was halted, local governments showed restraint with regards to the expression of criticisms of national governments. Overall nothing important

⁷²¹ FO371/100825-NS1023/13, Gascoigne, 3.5.1952; see Warner note on the 'Amended NATO deputies draft in Soviet foreign policy', FO371/100846-NS1071/2, 28.1.1952.

⁷²² The Soviet leadership was perceived as always treating international politics as secondary to domestic politics, FO371/106540-NS1073/1, Russian Secretariat paper, 'Peaceful Co-existence', 13.1.1953.

⁷²³ FO371/106504-NS1013/19, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 8.4.1953; FO371/106530-NS1023/47, 'Trends in Soviet policy', 9.6.1953.

⁷²⁴ FO371/106516-NS10110/80, W.J.S. Batho, Air Ministry, 'Stalin and after', 18.5.1953.

⁷²⁵ FO371/106530-NS1023/47, 'Trends in Soviet policy', 9.6.1953.

had been conceded; the most urgent international matter, the Korean War, would not be over until late July 1953. However, by offering small concession to minor problems the Kremlin had gained the upper hand and now the West, the Foreign Office feared, was in the defensive and would have possibly have to offer their own concessions next.⁷²⁶

Those who succeeded Stalin in the period of government by committee presented a united front. While Malenkov, Beria and Khrushchev knew that some reform was necessary, Molotov and Kaganovich disagreed.⁷²⁷ Beria even had, as Rayfield has argued, 'lost his taste for blood.'⁷²⁸ However, as usual in Soviet history, a leadership contest had at some point to come out into the open. Although we still do not know exactly what happened and why, it was announced on July 10th 1953 that Malenkov had in a report to a plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party attacked Beria for alleged criminal attempts to 'undermine the Soviet state in the interest of foreign capital and to set his ministry above the government and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.'⁷²⁹ Although Stalin was dead his tactics still proved rather useful to the new regime. Beria was relieved of all his posts and expelled from the party. It is safe to assume that his involvement in the many crimes of the Stalin era as well as his undeniable power by way of his ministry frightened the other party leaders and that they took the first opportunity to get rid of him. Interestingly, the Foreign Office had at the beginning of the year argued that a purge of Beria's ministry was in actual fact not unlikely.⁷³⁰

International opinion in the summer of 1953 was divided between those who saw Beria as the architect of the Soviet 'new look' and those who thought he was the main opponent of it. Gascoigne argued that Beria may have been on the hit list since April.⁷³¹ The result was that Malenkov appeared to be even more robustly in charge. Beria was arrested on June 27th and not heard off again. It is still a mystery why he had not protected himself better.⁷³² Although it was later stated that he was executed at the end of the year, he had in fact almost certainly been shot during the summer. His arrest was concluded to be the result of

⁷²⁶ FO371/106526-NS1021/64, Connelly 'A summary of indications of Soviet intentions since the death of Stalin', 3.6.1953.

⁷²⁷ Service, *Comrades*, p. 308.

⁷²⁸ Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen*, p. 447.

⁷²⁹ FO371/106505-NS1013/35, Moscow, 'Soviet Union weekly summary', 16.7.1953.

⁷³⁰ FO371/106513-NS1017/1, FO, 'The Plot inside the Kremlin', 13.1.1953.

⁷³¹ FO371/106518-NS10111/27, Gascoigne, 11.7.1953.

⁷³² Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen*, p. 447.

a power struggle at the top of the party at a time when the collective government façade was breaking down.⁷³³ The Foreign Office even speculated that the arrest of Beria illustrated the emergence of the Red Army as a major political force with the army leaders supporting the anti-Beria forces.⁷³⁴ What this assessment was based on is unclear from the documents and it is certainly surprising to see the Northern Department endorsing an opinion like this.

Probably necessarily, bearing his high international profile even after the loss of his post as Soviet foreign minister in mind, Molotov was seen initially as the most likely successor.⁷³⁵ However, while appreciating the importance of domestic politics for the Soviet leadership the Northern Department curiously failed to look for those in the party leadership who, even if lacking international profile, had a high domestic profile. Admittedly it was easier to speculate about those who were known in the West. A real succession contest was seen as unlikely. The Northern Department noted in May 1951 that ‘in all probability the mechanism for a smooth transference of power to Stalin’s successor is already in existence’, surprisingly underestimating Stalin’s grip on his Politburo.⁷³⁶ Although even today we have no information about a possible planned succession, it is unlikely that a leader like Stalin would willingly nominate a successor thus ostensibly weakening his power by admitting his own mortality. In actual fact he did everything in his power to dilute the influence of some of his potential successors.

On March 3rd, 1953 a communiqué was issued that Stalin had taken ill.⁷³⁷ Having had a supposed brain haemorrhage the day before this was an announcement without precedent. To take the decision to publish this information implied that Stalin really was mortally ill. Now, of course, the succession debate became a topic of hot debate. Then at 9.50 pm on March 5th, 1953 Stalin’s death was announced. The longest serving Soviet leader had finally died and left no immediate successor. Stalin had, the Moscow embassy noted, ‘when he died [been] czar in all but name.’⁷³⁸

⁷³³ FO371/106518-NS10111/29, FO to Moscow, 10.7.1953.

⁷³⁴ FO371/106528-NS1022/9, FO, ‘TCP’, 31.7.1953.

⁷³⁵ FO371/94806-NS1013/12, Harrison, 2.7.1951.

⁷³⁶ FO371/94815-NS10114/7, FO, 25.5.1951.

⁷³⁷ FO371/106504-NS1013/12, Moscow, ‘Soviet Union weekly summary’, 5.3.1953; Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall*, pp. 171-177.

⁷³⁸ FO371/106504-NS1013/19, Moscow, ‘Soviet Union quarterly report’, 8.4.1953.

The speed with which the succession changes were carried out suggests a certain degree of agreement among the senior party leaders or possibly a pre-arranged plan. No obvious power struggle was taking place.⁷³⁹ Malenkov appeared to be accepted as the new man in charge of the country and certainly portrayed that impression to foreign observers.⁷⁴⁰ Malenkov, Hohler suggested, 'is an adroit politician who may well succeed in riding the collective horse without falling off.'⁷⁴¹ However, he continued, 'totalitarianism and collective government cannot survive together for long and...a single leader must eventually emerge.' The collective leadership practised at that time would sooner or later be replaced by the emergence of another supreme ruler.⁷⁴² This, of course, was viewed with apprehension in the West as a new leader was an unpredictable entity. As it turned out government by committee worked until the changes that brought about Beria's arrest and subsequent execution. By that time the struggle that everyone had been waiting for was in full swing.⁷⁴³

Stalin's funeral was by all means an odd affair. Arranged with haste but following set precedents, it lacked a sense of real loss.⁷⁴⁴ Gascoigne noted that 'it was a mean, and to my mind a shabby, funeral cortege for so great a man.'⁷⁴⁵ The Hall of Columns, where Stalin's body lay in state, was not very remarkable and 'the entrance hall was full of soldiers behaving as if they were enjoying an interval at a theatre.'⁷⁴⁶ The indifference of ordinary people to this event was commented upon several times.⁷⁴⁷ Public displays of grief were very rare although Archie Brown has noted that many regretted his death.⁷⁴⁸ The party leaders obvious haste to get this funeral over and done with attracted not surprisingly some comment at the time.⁷⁴⁹ By April 1953 there even were rumours that 'Stalin was assisted out of this world.'⁷⁵⁰

⁷³⁹ FO371/ 106525-NS1021/50, Gascoigne letter, 22.4.1953.

⁷⁴⁰ FO371/106504-NS1013/9, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 8.4.1953.

⁷⁴¹ FO371/ 106512-NS1016/12, Hohler, 25.8.1953.

⁷⁴² FO371/ 106515-NS10110/33, Gascoigne, 6.2.1953; FO371/106517-NS10111/3, Mason minute, 7.3.1953.

⁷⁴³ FO371/106528-NS1022/9, FO, 'TCP', 31.7.1953; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 87.

⁷⁴⁴ FO371/106515-NS10110/14, Hankey, 6.3.1953.

⁷⁴⁵ FO371/106516-NS10110/53, Gascoigne, 9.3.1953.

⁷⁴⁶ FO371/106516-NS10110/59, Gascoigne, 13.3.1953.

⁷⁴⁷ For example, FO371/106516-NS10110/59, Gascoigne, 13.3.1953.

⁷⁴⁸ Brown, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 223.

⁷⁴⁹ FO371/106516-NS10110/80, W.J.S. Batho memorandum, Air Ministry, 'Stalin and after', 18.5.1953.

⁷⁵⁰ FO371/106528-NS1022/4, RC minutes, 8.4.1953.

Chapter Eleven: The ND and 'Cold Warfare', 1951-1953

The easiest way to capture a fortress is from within.

Stalin, 'Short History of the CPSU'⁷⁵¹

Cold Warfare, the aggressive and prolonged use of political and economic pressure through propaganda and trade sanctions, for example, had since 1945 become a recognised method of applying pressure on the West. In the absence of effective diplomacy due to the inability and unwillingness of both sides to talk and find ways to negotiate outstanding issues, it had become a tested Soviet means of putting the West under pressure and on the defensive in Europe and worldwide. The Cominform, the Peace Campaign and ceaseless propaganda as well as economic pressure and a very vocal policy in the UNO meant that the Foreign Office was faced with some form of Soviet attack nearly continuously.⁷⁵² Even though the Northern Department was by now used to this tactic Britain was still relatively slow to respond. A fast, appropriate and targeted response required a policy change that the British government had not yet taken. The Foreign Office had, however, admitted a COS representative to the Russia Committee thus acknowledging the importance of defence considerations in foreign policy. Greenwood argued that this in actual fact constituted a victory of the COS.⁷⁵³ Although the IRD, for example, was now trying to disseminate information that set Soviet propaganda in perspective, this effort was still very much low key. It was more in the international institutions, like the UNO, where the British government felt able to take a more pro-active and aggressive approach.

The Peace Offensive, which had run slightly out of steam but was still a formidable propaganda platform, continued to placate peoples worldwide with Soviet inspired slogans and campaigns. 'The Western democracies are now once more the declared enemy', a Northern Department paper noted.⁷⁵⁴ The Korean War, of course, proved a godsend for Soviet agitators. The first war since 1945, it caused anxiety among peoples and politicians

⁷⁵¹ Quoted in FO371/100831-NS1026/33, FO paper on 'Indications from the (a) 19th Party Congress of the All-Union Communist Party and (b) Stalin's 'Economic problems of Socialism in the USSR'', 6.11.1952.

⁷⁵² FO371/94815-NS10114/19, FO, 'Soviet foreign policy: Brief for the UK deputy to the North Atlantic Council of Deputies', 3.7.1951.

⁷⁵³ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 71.

⁷⁵⁴ FO371/94820-NS1021/14, FO, 'SWWIP', 6.2.1951.

alike about the immediate future. It was a perfect opportunity and the Kremlin exploited it to the fullest. Apart from campaigning on a peace platform it also provided a further opportunity to speak to and engage peoples out-with the UNO and bypassing their democratic governments in the West.

The Peace Campaign was an odd invention: propagating peace while using methods of political warfare. It was, apart from Communist parties and the Cominform, a main arm of Soviet foreign policy.⁷⁵⁵ On the other hand, the campaign restricted the Kremlin to those policies which fitted into its main concept. Further attempts to settle outstanding issues by military means, such as the Berlin Blockade, were difficult to justify. This possibly further supported a more stable Cold War at the time.⁷⁵⁶ Although calls for a final settlement of the German question continued, the Peace Campaign did not make much headway on this issue.⁷⁵⁷ Dixon, during a Russia Committee discussion, wondered whether the Kremlin really attached as many expectations to this campaign as thought.⁷⁵⁸ Others wondered as well, arguing that the campaign had been mostly only mildly successful.⁷⁵⁹ However, since the Soviet Union's aim was to dissociate the people from their respective governments and to create and then exploit revolutionary situations, the attainment of this goal stood in direct relation to the amount of effort put into it.⁷⁶⁰ For this reason the Peace Campaign and its possible successors were here to stay. It was to remain, as a Northern Department memorandum argued, the 'chief vehicle for Soviet political warfare.'⁷⁶¹ The Russia Committee agreed; Soviet propaganda would use the 'peace campaign as the main vehicle for their campaign of attrition against the West.'⁷⁶²

Since Soviet propaganda had failed in its attempt to persuade the Western peoples that a catastrophic economic slump was on the way, it changed tactics and now concentrated on peace. This was very clever and possibly quite successful. Most of the vital diplomatic issues at the time could be incorporated into this: the Korean War, Western European

⁷⁵⁵ FO371/94821-NS1021/24, FO, 'Soviet political aggression: Brief for the UK delegation to the preliminary Four Power Conference', 27.2.1951

⁷⁵⁶ FO371/94825-NS1021/69, Etherington-Smith, 17.9.1951.

⁷⁵⁷ FO371/94828- NS1024/2, FO, 'RST', 3.3.1951.

⁷⁵⁸ FO371/94845-NS1053/48, RC, 18.12.1951.

⁷⁵⁹ FO371/94875-NS1241/1, Uffen, 6.10.1951.

⁷⁶⁰ FO371/100830-NS1026/3, Uffen, 5.3.1952.

⁷⁶¹ FO371/100831-NS1026/33, FO, 'Indications from the 19th Party Congress of the All-Union Communist Party', 6.11.1952.

⁷⁶² FO371/100831-NS1026/31, RC, 6.11.1952.

military consolidation, West German and Japanese rearmament, British policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and the control of the atomic bomb.⁷⁶³ The underlying aim was, however, to affect actual political change. Regime change achieved through the disaffected in the West was a main concern of the Kremlin.⁷⁶⁴ A popular avenue for this was the colonial issue. In an attempt to further the problems the Western imperial powers were already facing in South East Asia and the Far East, the campaign to resist colonial suppression and exploitation, and to fan national liberation and independence forces was stepped up.⁷⁶⁵ But the campaign was also aimed at international bodies and variously tried to increase Soviet influence in them or change them into tools of the Kremlin. The Peace Campaign, in particular the World Peace Council, in the West was aiming at setting itself up to replace the UNO when the time was right. To achieve its overall objective it propagated the idea that the people themselves could stop a possible future war if they 'take the cause of peace into their own hands.'⁷⁶⁶ While the Peace Campaign varied in intensity it was always present.⁷⁶⁷

The Korean War was not surprisingly one of the main targets of the campaign. It allowed the spread of fear while ostensibly talking about peace; it also allowed frequent calls for a negotiated settlement in Korea through a Five Power Pact, something very much desired by the Kremlin. By offering to attend a conference to this end the Kremlin was again taking the initiative thus leaving the West in an awkward position.⁷⁶⁸ The Soviet government undoubtedly wanted the war to end as it had essentially exhausted its usefulness and was a drain on resources with the promise of only limited benefits. However, the Kremlin, just like the Chinese government, wanted peace on their terms.⁷⁶⁹ This close linking of Soviet and Communist aims and tactics with the Peace Campaign was problematic and alienated those who saw through the rhetoric.⁷⁷⁰ But Uffen's comment that 'the Soviet Peace Campaign has been exposed with considerable success as a thinly veiled Soviet game' may have been slightly too optimistic.⁷⁷¹ Many were new to

⁷⁶³ FO371/94800-NS1013/4, Moscow, 'Soviet Union fortnightly summary', 23.1.1951.

⁷⁶⁴ FO371/94801-NS1013/10, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 20.2.1951.

⁷⁶⁵ FO371/100831-NS1026/3, FO, 'Indications from the 19th Party Congress of the All-Union Communist Party', 6.11.1952.

⁷⁶⁶ FO371/94848-NS1071/4, Moscow chancery on a Soviet article about 'The role of the masses in the defence of peace', 6.6.1951.

⁷⁶⁷ FO371/94802-NS1013/18, Moscow, 'Fortnightly summary', 26.6.1951.

⁷⁶⁸ By the summer of 1951 430 million signatures had been collected in support of such a pact, FO371/94824-NS1021/61, FO, 'SWWPI', 24.8.1951.

⁷⁶⁹ For example, FO371/94824-NS1021/59, FO, 'SWWPI', 1.8.1951.

⁷⁷⁰ FO371/94821-NS1021/25, FO, 'SWWPI', 1.3.1951.

⁷⁷¹ FO371/94825-NS1021/67, Uffen, 17.9.1951.

propaganda and this use of it, and genuinely believed that the Soviet Union desired nothing more than world peace. Kelly, not usually taken to praising Soviet tactics, called the campaign a 'stroke of genius.'⁷⁷² All measures short of war were used and thus greatly expanded the possible scope of action. This, the Northern Department worried, included subversive agitation and sabotage in countries not under Communist control.⁷⁷³ Possible areas of conflict suggested were Greece, Finland, Germany or Persia. Particularly Germany and Japan were portrayed as becoming bastions of imperialist aggression that threatened world peace.⁷⁷⁴ With a well organised campaign on different levels continuously in action, the Northern Department was well aware that the Cold War with all its side-effects was here to stay.

Europe had always had close trading links among its countries. The importance of trade to economic and social recovery after the war gained a new importance in the discussions about a possible division of Germany. With the sealing of the Iron Curtain and the actual division of Germany into two by October 1949 the discussion about the serious repercussions of this loss of age-old trade links intensified. Both sides were worried. The Soviet bloc needed Western imports to acquire high-quality industrial goods that would aid economic recovery while the West was interested in food stuffs and natural resources it did not have enough of. Restrictions thus hurt both. As a result both Britain and the Soviet Union spent a lot of their time looking for workable solutions to the East-West trade issue.⁷⁷⁵ An ongoing problem was that the Soviet government always achieved a positive trade balance while the British one tended to be negative.⁷⁷⁶ The British government would have liked to see a more even balance but Stalin's trade discipline was well developed.

The increasing references to trade in Soviet propaganda reflected a real concern that a reduction in trade could harm the Soviet Union and delay economic progress.⁷⁷⁷ The Kremlin even suggested an international conference to discuss worldwide trade.⁷⁷⁸ Although this behaviour suggested that the Kremlin was worried about lacking

⁷⁷² FO371/94808-NS1015/68, Kelly, 13.9.1951.

⁷⁷³ FO371/94820-NS1021/12, Harrison, 'Possible Soviet reactions to the rearmament of West Germany', 19.1.1951.

⁷⁷⁴ FO371/94828- NS1024/2, FO, 'RST', 3.3.1951.

⁷⁷⁵ FO371/94559-NS1121/2, Uffen and Moscow chancery notes, 10.8.1951.

⁷⁷⁶ FO371/94800-NS1013/1, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 1.1.1951.

⁷⁷⁷ FO371/94801-NS1013/10, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 20.3.1951.

⁷⁷⁸ FO371/94802-NS1013/22, Moscow, 'Fortnightly Summary', 9.8.1951.

international, and in particular European, trade, the Russia Committee argued that this might not actually mean much.⁷⁷⁹ Assumptions in the West did not necessarily have to be correct. All this could possibly be a ploy to support the Peace Campaign with little cost to the Kremlin. Since direct evidence of the economic situation in the Soviet Union and the satellites was difficult to get, a lot of assumptions were necessarily based on insufficient information. It was, however, known that the Soviet authorities were unhappy with the economic progress made so far.

Britain was in a difficult situation. Further restrictions of trade with the Soviet Bloc would seriously harm the already precarious dollar balance and make the country more even more dependent on American financial aid.⁷⁸⁰ Any such action therefore would only be instituted if there was a real chance of achieving results, ie retard Soviet economic and thus military progress, the likelihood of which was questioned.⁷⁸¹ The US were, of course, in much better shape economically and could thus afford to contemplate stricter economic measures vis-à-vis the Soviet Bloc. In response, the Kremlin did not sit back but took the offensive. As usual linking several issues to make their point, Shvernik, president of the Supreme Soviet, himself told Truman in a letter that an improvement in trade was of vital importance in order to improve international relations.⁷⁸² Not surprisingly, the Russia Committee at the end of 1951 decided to take a closer look at this issue. The memorandum warned that

to add further measures of control to existing 'security export controls' would mean economic warfare and would represent a fundamental change of policy on our part, which could be justified only if we believed that war was both inevitable and imminent.⁷⁸³

This, of course, was an important point and the main problem. Although talk of war was essentially permanent, there was still no direct evidence that war on a larger scale than Korea was about to or would break out in the near future. War as a justification of increased trade controls was therefore of limited benefit. The implications of the imposition of these controls were severe: the Kremlin was likely to close off the Soviet

⁷⁷⁹ FO371/94845-NS1053/38, RC notes, 18.9.1951.

⁷⁸⁰ FO371/94845-NS1053/39, RC notes on paper by the Mutual Aid Department, 18.9.1951.

⁷⁸¹ FO371/106531-NS1024/1, FO, brief for the Secretary of State, 30.1.1953.

⁷⁸² FO371/94845-NS1053/49, RC notes, 3.12.1951.

⁷⁸³ FO371/94845-NS1053/49, RC, 'East-West trade', 3.12.1951.

bloc to the West and may well also flex its muscles with regards to China and potentially other countries. The 'strategic criteria' devised by Western governments to restrict the trade of those goods seen as vital to the enhancement of Soviet war potential would have to be rethought. A connected issue was the trade with third countries that were known to trade with the Soviet Union. How to restrict trade to those in an attempt to prevent a possible re-sale of imports to the Soviet Union was a politically highly complicated and charged matter. Overall, the Northern Department thought, all this talk of an improvement in trade relations was most likely to be an effort to pull wool over the eyes of the West. The Soviet Union, it was argued, would undoubtedly 'try to accelerate the process of disintegration of the Capitalist West by economic warfare.'⁷⁸⁴ Stalin himself had stated that the division of the world market was one of the most important economic consequences of the war.⁷⁸⁵ He, however, took no responsibility but continued to exploit this idea when trying to persuade the West to keep particularly that trade open that benefited him most.

While the Peace Campaign and the extensive discussions about the state of international trade took up a lot of the time of the Northern Department, proceedings in the UNO in New York were often even more important. This was the most high-profile platform for discussion and propaganda available and was duly exploited by the Kremlin. But unlike attacks and accusation elsewhere, here they had to be refuted vigorously by Britain if damage or the appearance of weakness was to be avoided. As a result it was here where information about the Soviet Union and about conditions in the satellite countries was used to counter Soviet claims and to raise the stakes in political warfare. While the Soviet representatives had for quite some time been able to use the UNO as a platform for attacking the West without an equivalent reply from the Western governments, this situation had changed by the late 1940s. As the British government sanctioned the use of information about the Soviet bloc in the UNO and elsewhere, the British representatives became more confident and more outspoken in their criticism of the Communist policies.

The UNO was fought over by both sides. It was the personification of the new idea of collective security and responsibility, and just like the League of Nations after 1919, resulted from the desire to prevent another world war. It could also, due to its composition and voting procedures, not easily be exploited by the Soviet government. As a result Stalin

⁷⁸⁴ FO371/100851-NS1102/23, FO, 3.10.1952.

⁷⁸⁵ FO371/125006-ZP15/5, RC paper, 17.10.1952.

and other senior leaders attacked it for being a stooge of Western, and in particular American, imperialism. With the increasing effort put into the Peace Campaign, Soviet criticism became more outspoken in an attempt to clear the way for a transfer of peoples allegiance away from the UNO should the opportune moment arise.⁷⁸⁶ Criticism, of course, did not mean that the Soviet Union was likely to leave the UNO. It would only do so when absolutely certain that a large number of countries would follow this example and that the Peace Campaign and its World Peace Council could provide an alternative.⁷⁸⁷ That this never happened is one indication of the transparency and actual political weakness of the Soviet Union. It may have also been partly due to the use of the veto in the Security Council to block those policies regarded as unwelcome by the Kremlin. As long as the Soviet government perceived some form of benefit from remaining in the UNO it continued to stay. The mistake to leave the UNO Security Council over the continued presence of the Kuomintang representative proved a costly mistake and was difficult to rectify. It was unlikely that the Kremlin would make that mistake again. At the same time, the inability of the UNO to secure a settlement in Korea had dampened hopes of its overall usefulness.⁷⁸⁸

Britain supported the UNO for what it was: a meeting place to discuss matters and a way to keep contact with the Soviet government that had retreated further behind the Iron Curtain.⁷⁸⁹ It could not but benefit from the organisations continued presence even though the Soviet representatives often exasperated the West. It was, however, a difficult balancing act. The Soviet representatives continued to press for the control of atomic weapons while being aware of their superiority of conventional arms that did not fall under any such control. Progress was also slow in the discussion in the various councils dealing with social and economic issues and the ongoing problem of Germany. While the Soviet government flatly refused to allow a UNO commission access to the GDR to investigate political issues, particularly the new voting system, it continuously argued against the incorporation of the FRG into the Western bloc. One specific issue raised by Vyshinsky was the apparent incompatibility of NATO with the UNO.⁷⁹⁰ This was dangerous for the West and thus required very careful handling and precise preparation. The Soviet government, it was well known in the Northern Department, usually sent their best

⁷⁸⁶ FO371/94801-NS1013/6, Moscow 'Fortnightly summary', 21.1.1951; FO371/94801-NS1013/10, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 20.3.1951; FO371/94825-NS1021/77, FO, 'SWWIP', 16.10.1951.

⁷⁸⁷ FO371/94822-NS1021/36, Morgan, 27.3.1951..

⁷⁸⁸ FO371/100847-NS1072/1, Titchener, 7.1.1952.

⁷⁸⁹ FO371/100825-NS1023/5, Mason, 16.1.1952.

⁷⁹⁰ FO371/100827-NS1024/2, FO, 'SWWPI', 22.1.1952.

diplomats to the UNO indicating the importance they attached to a good performance there.⁷⁹¹ Increasingly Britain had to do the same, ensuring more staff and better preparations before important debates. Political warfare had thus permeated all layers of policy making and could not be ignored in the discussion of any matter regarding the Soviet Union.

⁷⁹¹ FO371/100830-NS1026/26, Watson minute, 9.10.1952.

Chapter Twelve: The ND on Germany and Western European defence, 1951-1953

A Germany free to conduct its own affairs would be a most dangerous experiment for either side.

Gascoigne, Moscow, 3.5.1952⁷⁹²

Germany remained at the heart of the conflict between the erstwhile allies: geo-strategically too important at the heart of the continent to be conceded to the other side without a fight, economically too critical for western European recovery, politically potentially too independent to be left completely to its own devices. While 1949 had seen the end of the Berlin Blockade and the resultant foundations of two Germany's, that settlement was, at least to the Soviet Union, not necessarily final and 1951 saw another attempt, initiated by the Soviet Union, to reach an agreement over Germany's future. The West had been steadily integrating the FRG into the defence planning of Western Europe, some political control had been given to Adenauer's government and while the war, the Holocaust and the resultant de-nazification were by no means forgotten or finished, slowly some normality began to emerge in the country. Unification remained important to the wider public but the threat of a Sovietisation of West Germany by guise had been averted. The GDR remained a pawn of the Soviet Union in the game of stalling Western attempts to consolidate Western strategic planning. Britain found it difficult to choose sides. Its problematic relationship with Europe and the reluctance to commit fully to it has long interested historians. Greenwood, for example, is rather critical about Bevin's slipping interest in Europe while pursuing a closer relationship with the USA.⁷⁹³

An exchange of notes commenced between the Soviet Union and the West in December 1950. Complaining that German rearmament contradicted the Potsdam agreement, specifically agreements on the demilitarisation of Germany and clauses 2 and 7 of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty of 1942, the Soviet Government, on December 22nd 1950, requested the Western allies to halt further plans for German rearmament, hoping that France may be

⁷⁹² FO371/100825-NS1023/17, notes of conversation between Mason and Moscow embassy staff, 3.5.1952.

⁷⁹³ Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War*, p. 72.

susceptible to that argument. The West, by now well aware of this Soviet tactic of trying to cause divisions amongst the Allies (particularly the French were not keen on German rearmament), replied by proposing a Four Power meeting to consider the grievances and offered an agenda for discussions.⁷⁹⁴ Shortly after the Soviet government in principle agreed to meet.⁷⁹⁵ A long period of haggling over the terms of the proposed meeting ensued. Britain denied that Western defence planning constituted a threat to peace while the Soviet Union slowly changed the focus of their interest in these talks from Germany to the wider issue of Western defence.⁷⁹⁶ Only the location of the meeting was settled fast: Paris. One area of contention was the insistence of the West to include the discussion of the sources of the international tension in these talks while the Soviet Union wanted initially to concentrate solely on Germany.⁷⁹⁷ It wanted, if possible, to sort out the problem of Germany without compromising interests anywhere else.⁷⁹⁸ To shore up support among the Germans for these talks the Soviet government increased propaganda emphasis on the two issues guaranteed to interest most of them: reunification and a peace treaty with the implications of an early end to both the occupation of the country and possibly reparations.⁷⁹⁹ In the West of the country this strategy proved only mildly successful.

By March 1951 the Soviet government had agreed to meet in Paris to discuss an agenda for the foreign ministers to meet.⁸⁰⁰ Gromyko's attempt to keep the discussion exclusively on Germany failed at the first meeting on March 5th, 1951. But while the Soviet Union was unwilling to discuss issues important to the West, it was not averse to press for a discussion of those topics important to herself: NATO, Western defence plans and US bases in Europe.⁸⁰¹ The Kremlin was, as in this instance, obviously reacting to Western policies rather than coming up with new ones on its own.⁸⁰² Gromyko fought hard to secure an agenda which acknowledged the significance of German demilitarisation. The usual stalemate duly arrived. Tiring of Soviet manoeuvres the Western Allies suggested a meeting of foreign ministers in New York in July. Gromyko remained unwilling to

⁷⁹⁴ FO371/94800-NS1013/2, Moscow, 'Soviet Union fortnightly summary', 6.1.1951; FO371/94834-NS1051/11, FO, 'Questions for discussion with the Soviet government arising out of Soviet expressed willingness for negotiations with HMG with a view to improving Anglo-Soviet relations', 7.3.1951.

⁷⁹⁵ FO371/94800-NS1013/3, Moscow, 'Soviet Union fortnightly summary', 9.1.1951.

⁷⁹⁶ FO371/94800-NS1013/4, Moscow, 'Soviet Union fortnightly summary', 23.1.1951.

⁷⁹⁷ FO371/94850-NS1073/5, FO, 'Four power talks – German demilitarisation in the context of the general level of armaments', 30.5.1951.

⁷⁹⁸ FO371/94801-NS1013/10, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 20.3.1951.

⁷⁹⁹ FO371/94819-NS1021/4, Nicholls, Moscow, 'Analysis of current Soviet policy', 6.1.1951.

⁸⁰⁰ FO371/94801-NS1013/12, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 12.4.1951.

⁸⁰¹ FO371/94802-NS1013/16, Moscow, 'Fortnightly summary', 28.5.1951.

⁸⁰² Reynolds, *One World Divisible*, p. 117.

compromise; eventually rejecting all three Western proposals for an agenda.⁸⁰³ Unable to secure an agenda on his terms his interest in the whole idea declined rapidly. Trying to salvage a possible high-level meeting for the first time in years the West compromised and agreed to put NATO on the agenda. A full discussion of Western plans, however, was not promised. Unwilling to see this as enough of a gesture and unwilling to suggest an agenda of her own, the Soviet Union stalled. Eventually after weeks of haggling an exasperated West finally ended discussions but made it clear that the invitation to a CFM remained open. Gromyko blamed the West for this breakdown of discussions but probably intentionally caused it.⁸⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, Soviet propaganda had a field day with this, claiming that the West was unwilling to negotiate to relieve intentional tension while building up NATO as an aggressive tool.⁸⁰⁵ These preliminary discussions broke down not because the issue of Germany was too difficult but because each side was unwilling to discuss those issues most vital to themselves: continued Western European integration and Western defence, including Germany, which left the Soviet Union facing a mighty military alliance on its door step, and those Soviet policies of Stalinisation, oppression and sedition which so worried the West. Both sides accused each other of causing the rise in international tension that was so palpable at that time.

David Kelly, British ambassador to the Soviet Union, summarised the implications of this episode in a letter to Dixon: the Soviet focus on the rearmament of Germany had been overtaken by an even more intense focus on the Atlantic Pact. Even more importantly, he pointed out the problem at the heart of the Western European defence effort. Germany would only be rearmed once the Western powers had sufficiently armed themselves and that 'the military strength of the Atlantic Treaty nations themselves was thus both the basis of Western policy and a prerequisite of German rearmament.'⁸⁰⁶ But he also argued that the Soviet Union must have realised by now that it was very difficult to retard the Western defence effort.⁸⁰⁷ The COS by then supported the rearmament of West Germany.⁸⁰⁸ Germany remained the crux of the matter: vital for the Western rearmament effort but simultaneously also guaranteed to inflame the already oversized anxiety of the Soviet Union. Germany had to be a part of the Western defence effort if that was ever going to be a potent deterrent or actual weapon.

⁸⁰³ FO371/94802-NS1013/17, Moscow, 'Fortnightly summary', 14.6.1951.

⁸⁰⁴ FO371/94802-NS1013/18, Moscow, 'Fortnightly summary', 26.6.1951.

⁸⁰⁵ FO371/94829-NS1024/8, FO, 'Monthly review of Soviet intentions', 16.7.1951.

⁸⁰⁶ FO371/94802-NS1013/20, Kelly, 'Quarterly report', 13.7.1951.

⁸⁰⁷ FO371/94824-NS1021/55, Kelly to Dixon, 20.7.1951.

⁸⁰⁸ Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 87.

The resulting threat of a preventive war to prevent this fortified front from coming into existence was a well recognised issue in the West.⁸⁰⁹ However, the alternative, as the West and the Soviets well realised, was to leave Germany to its own devices. Both sides knew that the West at this stage in the Cold War was unable, even if willing, to do so. As Nicholls pointed out very clearly ‘peace in Europe largely depends on our ability to maintain stable conditions in Western Germany until a proper balance of military strength has been restored.’⁸¹⁰ And that balance, as was argued by Harrison shortly after, would massively favour the Soviet Union if the Western defence programme was abandoned. That programme was, in his words, a ‘serious impediment to their overall programme of expansion.’ The Soviet leaders, he continued to argue, were interested in controlling the whole of Germany while simultaneously preventing it from re-emerging as a military force.⁸¹¹ While working towards this aim, a neutral Germany was foremost on the Soviet mind and Germany thus remained critical to both sides.⁸¹² In the absence of a neutral Germany, a divided one was the preferred option of the Soviet Union.⁸¹³ A smaller country, in the Soviet mind, equalled a smaller threat. Divided resources and possibly divided loyalties would make the emergence of an independent and forceful German nationalism difficult. The British government, on the other hand, realised that cooperation with the Kremlin over Germany was only realistic on British terms. British interests in Europe, Deighton has noted, made that essentially impossible.⁸¹⁴

The Northern Department was well aware of these issues and debates. It also knew that time was of the essence. Without the inclusion of Germany the Western defence effort would stall. Without further British rearmament that effort would not get off the ground in the first place. The French, not keen on the idea of a remilitarised Germany, were difficult partners and any hint that Germany need not be rearmed had to be silenced immediately.⁸¹⁵ Other smaller countries were also not exactly overjoyed by that prospect. That is why the British and Americans had to be involved, as if to guarantee a safe administration of a remilitarised Germany, and why France had to remain in support of her allies. Once Germany would actually be rearmed all this support would be needed as Soviet counter-

⁸⁰⁹ FO371/94819-NS1021/3, FO, ‘Estimate of Soviet intentions if there is no general settlement with the West’, 1.1.1951.

⁸¹⁰ FO371/94819-NS1021/4, Nicholls, Moscow, ‘Analysis of current Soviet policy’, 6.1.1951.

⁸¹¹ FO371/94820-NS1021/12, Harrison, ‘Possible Soviet reactions to the rearmament of Germany’, 19.1.1951; Dixon agreed, FO371/94843-NS1053/17, RC minutes, 16.3.1951.

⁸¹² FO371/94821-NS1021/25, FO, ‘SWWPI’, 1.3.1951.

⁸¹³ FO371/100825-NS1023/17, Titchener, ‘Soviet policy towards the unification of Germany’, 3.5.1952.

⁸¹⁴ Deighton, ‘Towards a Western strategy’, p. 53.

⁸¹⁵ For example, FO371/106537-NS1071/40, Hohler, 28.3.1953.

measures were widely anticipated, although the Russia Committee quite rightly asked what Soviet military action was possible that would not result in a European war.⁸¹⁶ The Soviet apprehension of this scenario could not easily be countered. While fear of a renewed German militarism/expansionism could not be discounted out of hand, a strategic change in Western thinking was unlikely.⁸¹⁷

The value of Germany to the Soviet Union, however, also had another interesting aspect to it. There was a spirited discussion in the embassy and the Northern Department about whether the Soviet Union was willing to 'give up' the GDR in order to prevent the remilitarisation of the FRG. Although arguments flowed back and forth, the eventual consensus was that the Soviet Union would not be interested in this.⁸¹⁸ The 'safety features' of such a deal were too slim. Even more importantly, as the Russia Committee argued, 'to incorporate the manpower and industrial resources of the whole of Germany in the Muscovite Empire is one of the chief aims of Soviet policy.'⁸¹⁹ To expect the Soviet Union to give up the hard-won half of that price was unrealistic. By the same token, the West would not give up its hard won half either. A demilitarised West Germany at this time was open to be manipulated through propaganda and political pressure by both the Soviet Union and the GDR; a resultant expansion of Soviet influence was a real possibility and would move the Iron Curtain even further towards the West. Foreign Office opinion faced with this prospect was unanimous in cautioning that the West should not fall into this 'Russian trap.'⁸²⁰ The threats to Western security should the Soviet government succeed in splitting Western opinion at the Paris talks were real. Soviet proposals to halt or end Western and German rearmament within a general drive to end the emerging arms race or a detailed attempt to enforce the Potsdam agreement on German disarmament could negate any progress the West had made by then in consolidating its political will and resources in the face of Soviet aggression.

⁸¹⁶ For example, a new Berlin Blockade; FO371/94819-NS1021/3, FO, 'Estimate of Soviet intentions if there is no general settlement with the West', 1.1.1951; FO371/94842-NS1053/2, RC, 2.1.1951; FO371/100868-NS1192/1, Brimelow, 'The Communist answer to the rearmament of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation powers', 10.3.1952.

⁸¹⁷ For example, FO371/94819-NS1021/4, Nicholls, Moscow, 'Analysis of current Soviet policy', 6.1.1951.

⁸¹⁸ FO371/94825-NS1021/77, FO, 'SWWPI', 16.10.1951. FO371/100846-NS1071/2, Morgan minuted in January 1952 that opinion in the US State Department was equally divided, 28.1.1952; FO371/100830-NS1026/4, note of a conversation between Roberts and the Yugoslav ambassador in London who argued in favour of this argument, 30.4.1952.

⁸¹⁹ FO371/94842-NS1053/2, RC minutes, 2.1.1951.

⁸²⁰ FO371/94850-NS1073/3, record of ministerial meeting in Dixon's room, 22.5.1951.

Disagreements in the assessment of the purpose of Western rearmament could easily have led to further disagreements further down the priority list of the British and American governments, eg. further European economic integration, decolonisation, free trade and an end to preferential tariffs. Germany had a central place in some of these plans and its contribution to Western defence was deemed crucial. Disarmament was, as a ministerial meeting in Dixon's room pointed out, in any case 'such a complicated question that we cannot possibly expect an immediate solution at a single four power meeting.' Although it was agreed that the possibility of serious talks with the Soviets should not be doomed from the start by a Western unwillingness to discuss the issue, it was equally important to project strength, not weakness, and not to leave West Germany open to Soviet penetration. The Soviet government was to be made to understand that 'German contribution to Western defence is part and parcel of the whole problem of European security and ...was forced upon us by Soviet policy.'⁸²¹

Whenever the issue of Germany came up or threatened to come up in conversations in Moscow, for example between the British ambassador and a member of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a change in topic was indicated.⁸²² Britain and the West did not want a change in policy which would negate any progress made so far towards greater economic and military integration in Western Europe while concomitant progress in the easing of international tensions held out by the Soviet Union was highly likely to be merely a passing episode of mainly tactical significance. Germany was about to become a central part of the Western defence effort but the Contractual Agreements with Germany and the creation of the EDC still had to be finalised and ratified.⁸²³ Until that was done Germany was not to be a topic of conversation with the Soviets. With the increasing importance of the FRG another issue emerged: Adenauer and his government had secured a Western promise not to do deals behind his back.⁸²⁴ Although occupied by the Western Allies the FRG was not actually run as an occupied country. Much of the local administration, re-emerging industries and social security networks were build up and operated by the Germans themselves. As a large populous country in the middle of Europe it could not be treated as dice in a board game. Adenauer was well aware of this. He knew that his country was needed to provide a counterweight to the GDR and that

⁸²¹ FO371/94850-NS1073/5, record of ministerial meeting in Dixon's room, 30.5.1951.

⁸²² FO371/100825-NS1023/1, Gascoigne, 3.1.1952.

⁸²³ FO371/100846-NS1071/2, note by Warner on an amended NATO deputies draft on Soviet foreign policy, 28.1.1952.

⁸²⁴ FO371/100825-NS1023/5, Roberts note on a draft brief for Foreign Secretary for a possible conversation with Vyshinsky, 16.1.1952.

remilitarisation was in effect only a matter of time. Therefore, in the FRG the government and its people could sleep slightly more relaxed when the foreign ministers of the western occupying powers openly stated their intent to support the defence of the country and explicitly acknowledged the FRG's right to defend herself. Later this was broadened to include the decision to admit Germany to the European army.⁸²⁵

The possibility of a remilitarised West Germany essentially backed by the military might not only of Britain but also of the USA was a serious worry, and one that could not be easily brushed aside by the Foreign Office.⁸²⁶ The concern to the Soviet Union, they well realised, was legitimate. Nevertheless, in the absence of a genuine willingness on the part of the Soviet government to reach an agreement that was acceptable to both sides the options were extremely limited. The Soviet government continued to press for Four Power talks in order to prevent the ratification of defence agreements and the full integration of West Germany into the Western European defence mechanism but did not offer significantly improved suggestions to secure top level negotiations.⁸²⁷ In August 1952 Roberts commented during a Russia Committee meeting that 'the Soviets seemed to have given up all hope for a German settlement with the West.'⁸²⁸

The dogged haggling over German remilitarisation was not surprising. The tactical and practical implication of an effective Western European defence system demanded the stationing of troops on German soil. In order to be able to proceed uninterruptedly on the Western side, Soviet intervention leading to possible doubts in the minds of the more wavering of the European allies had to be silenced, preferably from the start. The whole defence of this Western defence system was based not on a common aim as such but on a common threat. The public as well as the political establishments had to be convinced that the massive effort to rearm their countries so soon after a world war was worth the effort. Once the suggestion of a common enemy was gone, that effort would be nearly impossible to sustain. For that reason any hint of a relaxation of the Soviet Cold War tactics in Europe, the UNO or in bilateral diplomacy had to be carefully monitored. Another issue of importance here is the, justified, feeling on the part of the Western allies that any

⁸²⁵ FO371/94800-NS1013/1, Moscow, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 1.1.1951.

⁸²⁶ FO371/100825-NS1023/17, Titchener, 'Soviet policy towards the Unification of Germany', 3.5.1952.

⁸²⁷ FO371/100841-NS1052/21, RC, 3.6.1952.

⁸²⁸ FO371/100842-NS1052/31, Roberts, RC minutes, 27.8.1952.

discussion about the future of Germany which they had defeated, was foremost their responsibility.

Stressing that the EDC would not be an instrument of aggression, the British nevertheless pointed out that the result of the ongoing negotiations would lead to 'powerful armed forces of NATO ...entrenched all along the Western front of the Soviet world.' While the Soviets were alarmed the Northern Department knew that the West had few choices: 'if the Allies are obliged to withdraw their armies from Germany there is absolutely nowhere else where those forces can be stationed.' The implications would be severe: 'a withdrawal from Germany therefore means the crumbling of the whole American position in Europe and the consequent abandonment by European countries of any concerted policy of resistance to Soviet expansion.'⁸²⁹ Thus the stakes in the Cold War game of international diplomacy were extremely high. Stalin himself intervened at the international stage when he chose to reply to several questions put to him by American newspaper editors in April 1952. Being aware of the Western apprehension of discussing German matters outside the camp of the Western allies he, in typical fashion, addressed the issue directly. When asked whether he considered the present moment to be right for the unification of Germany he replied 'yes, I do.'⁸³⁰

Unification would mean potentially less Allied and more Soviet control and possibly a swift peace treaty with the resulting withdrawal of occupation troops. The moment might then be ripe for the SED, the Communist Party in the West, trade unions etc. through local activities, intimidation and propaganda to secure the whole country for the Eastern Bloc. Tactical withdrawal, the use of local communist forces, propaganda and sedition, all well-known Soviet tactics, would thus give Stalin the victory he craved through the backdoor. That could very possibly lead to Western intervention and war in Europe.

Stalin embodied the growing confidence of the Soviet regime not only to have an opinion on world affairs but also to make it known internationally. The focus of the Soviet government had since 1949/1950 shifted from a concentration on German remilitarisation

⁸²⁹ FO371/100846-NS1071/2, Warner note on the amended NATO deputies draft on Soviet foreign policy, 28.1.1952.

⁸³⁰ FO371/100847-NS1072/4, FO minute, 2.4.1952.

to efforts to prevent the ratification of the German Contractual Agreements and the EDC, and to a more conventional Communist effort to weaken the resolve of the Western European allies and erode their trust in their transatlantic ally. This new Soviet confidence however did not ignore the fact that Stalin and his Politburo had twice failed to read the international signs accurately before, once in June 1941 and once again in June 1950. If war were to break out again, it was not clear how confident they would be this time in reading the signs correctly to take the appropriate action. Grey, visiting Germany, Austria and Poland in February 1952, noted that Soviet policy towards Germany was possibly an 'equal measure of hope and fear...I suspect that fear predominates.'⁸³¹ To negotiate from fear was bound to be more difficult than to negotiate from strength; the Soviets had shown several times before that they would not be backed into a corner and surrender.

⁸³¹ FO371/106524-1205, Grey, 24.2.1953.

Chapter Thirteen: ND input into FO policy, 1951-1953

Partial war.

G. F. Kennan, 1.10.1952⁸³²

13.1. Assessing Britain's interests and policies

The British government had long realised that it did not have enough political gravitas on the international stage to pursue a fully independent foreign policy. As a result the importance to form a special bond with the USA and bring Western European nations closer together and closer to Britain, particularly against the backdrop of increased tensions with the Soviet Union and China, had become a priority. A leading role in Europe and a close second to the USA in the world were what the Foreign Office was aiming for. It would safeguard British interests and ensure a place at the top table should the international situation deteriorate. The Foreign Office agreed with the American concept of containment as a doctrine of foreign policy and set about implementing it. In Europe, however, the undecided state of Germany made that implementation difficult. The consensus with France to rearm West Germany was rather fragile and amidst growing pressure to curb the increasing rearmament in Britain, the Foreign Office had to take a more active role to educate both Britain and Europe about the danger of allowing the Soviet Union to retard the Western European defence and recovery effort.⁸³³

Two developments had greatly improved the Western bargaining position and Western confidence: military strength had increased substantially and the West had demonstrated in South Korea that attempts to militarily intervene in the national affairs of a sovereign country would be met by force.⁸³⁴ Other developments too had allowed an increased Western firmness vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and China. Although a Germany peace treaty

⁸³² FO371/125006-ZP15/3, letter to the US State Department, 6.9.1952.

⁸³³ FO371/94808-NS1015/68, Kelly, 'Considerations concerning HMG dealings with the Soviet government', 13.9.1951.

⁸³⁴ FO371/94802-NS1013/20, Kelly, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 13.7.1951.

was a distant hope, the Japanese peace treaty had been signed San Francisco in 1951.⁸³⁵ In Europe, the Italian peace treaty was under re-consideration to permit the rearmament of the country while both Greece and Turkey were in talks to join NATO thus increasing Western military muscle as well as its geo-strategic extent.⁸³⁶ Against this backdrop a short note by Hohler is revealing. Commenting on a letter by Kelly he minuted that

he [Kelly] then goes on to suggest that, if the Western powers play their cards right, a state of equilibrium may be reached – in some ways comparable to the 19th century balance of power – which may endure for an indefinite period. This is certainly a thesis to which we would subscribe...it is fundamental to the policy being pursued by HMG.⁸³⁷

This effectively argued against the relatively new idea of collective security and responsibility. A balance of power implied, as in the old days, great power diplomacy, the dominance of a few great powers over smaller countries. The UNO, as the face and means of the new collective idea, had not yet really proven itself. So it is not surprising that it was difficult for any government to put its faith in it completely. Kelly, in his letter, went on to explain that ‘it is highly probable that it is at least as much thanks to this doctrine [Stalin’s doctrine that time is on his side] as to the Atom Bomb that Western Europe has not been already overrun.’ If the Soviet Union was not needlessly provoked, for example by adhering to ‘supple and tactful diplomacy’, a war could hopefully be avoided.⁸³⁸ By the same token, a balance of power that would guarantee the West’s security had to be secure and include as many Western European countries as possible to balance the Eastern European Soviet bloc.

While the West could sit back a little more easily, the Soviet Union, as the Foreign Office well recognised, had had a series of reverses over the past few years. The Marshall Plan,

⁸³⁵ The peace treaty was followed by a bilateral US-Japanese defence pact which worried the Kremlin immensely, see FO371/94824-NS1021/61, FO, ‘SWWPI’, 24.8.1951; Dixon argued in a memorandum that this could push the Soviet government to go over to a war economy, FO371/94824-NS1021/63, ‘Soviet intentions and allied policy’, 31.8.1951; the treaty would in the Northern Department’s opinion lead to a re-evaluation of Soviet policy in the Far East, FO731/94825-NS1021/68, ‘SWWPI’, 18.9.1951; FO731/94825-NS1021/69, Etherington-Smith note on ‘Views on possible effects of signing the Japanese peace treaty on Soviet worldwide policy’, 17.9.1951.

⁸³⁶ FO731/94803-NS1013/27, Kelly, ‘Soviet Union quarterly report’, 11.10.1951; both Greece and Turkey joined NATO in 1952.

⁸³⁷ FO731/94808-NS1015/68, Hohler, 13.9.1951.

⁸³⁸ FO731/94808-NS1015/68, Kelly, ‘Considerations concerning HMG dealings with the Soviet government’, 13.9.1951.

Tito's defection, increasing Western consolidation and rearmament, and a failure of Western European Communist parties to make a significant impact had left the Soviet government on the defensive, often apparently reacting to Western initiatives. As a result of this and unless specific proposals were put forward, the Kremlin was unwilling to negotiate to reduce international tension.⁸³⁹ It was the substantially higher level of conventional armaments that the Soviet Union possessed which made her unlikely to succumb to Western pressure, although some argued that these were intended mostly as a deterrent.⁸⁴⁰ One point of the accelerated Western rearmament, the doctrine of containment and efforts to establish situations of strength was to balance that superiority to be able to negotiate from strength and achieve local or limited settlements. The downside to that argument, as a Northern Department memorandum reveals, was that while the West rearmed and consolidated, the Soviet Union was likely to put all effort into achieving economic parity with the West which was likely to lead to a deterioration rather than an improvement in Soviet attitudes towards the non-Communist world.⁸⁴¹ Gascoigne, the new British ambassador in Moscow, thus rightly discussed the possible success of a high level meeting in these circumstances and found that it was unlikely to lead to an easing of that tension. British policy towards the Soviet Union, he argued, should continue to be firm and consistent.⁸⁴² The Northern Department agreed but acknowledged that Britain should still be prepared for this eventuality.⁸⁴³ Essentially, however, Strang argued in a note in August 1951, Britain had to continue what had emerged as a path since 1945, that is to say that the West was going ahead in international affairs without the Soviet Union.⁸⁴⁴

Soviet foreign policy, defined by a nationalist imperialism and the intent to create a Communist world order, was ambitious. Although direct intervention in Western European affairs was rare (for example, the Berlin Blockade), indirect intervention through propaganda, national Communist parties, and international organisations and campaigns was frequent and tenacious. Aimed, in Europe, at preventing further Western integration particularly in NATO, at stalling the Western European recovery effort and at bringing Western European Communist parties into positions of power, it betrayed a determined effort to subject the West to direct Soviet influence and move the global centre of political

⁸³⁹ FO371/94808-NS1015/83, Gascoigne, 'First impressions of Moscow', 5.12.1951.

⁸⁴⁰ FO371/94819-NS1021/4, Nicholls, 'Analysis of current Soviet policy', 6.1.1951.

⁸⁴¹ FO371/94815-NS10114/7, FO, 'The stability of the Soviet regime and its effects on Soviet relations with the non-Communist world', 25.5.1951.

⁸⁴² FO371/94808-NS1015/83, Gascoigne, 'First impressions of Moscow', 5.12.1951.

⁸⁴³ FO371/94808-NS1015/83, Hohler, 5.12.1951.

⁸⁴⁴ FO371/94824-NS1021/63, Strang minute, 24.8.1951.

and military gravity East.⁸⁴⁵ ‘The Russians’, as Dixon so eloquently noted, ‘are expansionist, flowing like the tide into any area where the dams are down.’⁸⁴⁶ If confronted by concerted and firm reaction, as in Berlin, the Soviet government would probably retreat.⁸⁴⁷ Overall, however, the Northern Department assessment of likely Soviet reactions was more subdued: ‘it thus remains our estimate that the Soviet government still does not want a global war. But we believe it will run greater risks of war than hitherto in the face of growing Western resistance rather than modify its objectives.’⁸⁴⁸ This risk was likely to increase if the four former Allies should not at some point reach an agreement on some of the most pressing points of the early Cold War: Germany, Korea, disarmament and the control of atomic energy.

The British fear was that the Soviet Union would succeed in pushing the West towards a point where it had no choice but to declare war.⁸⁴⁹ A united West was the best insurance against this eventuality and precisely this was a problem. Britain and the USA were dependent on each other in the event of a war against the Soviet Union and thus foreign and military policy discussions on both sides had to take this fact into consideration.⁸⁵⁰ The British enthusiasm for NATO, Bartlett has argued, was partly a result of the perception that Britain would now be able to subtly influence American foreign policy.⁸⁵¹ This, of course, was a complicated matter and fraught with difficulties.⁸⁵² The Soviet government relentlessly tried to divide the Western governments and thus reduce opposition to its plans while at the same time trying to reassure them that they were not interested in a new war.⁸⁵³ Soviet proposals of what to do with the Germans threatened to reduce the resolve of particularly the French to continue on the planned path. The COS, just like the Foreign Office, were worried about this possibility, arguing that a ‘calming campaign’ by the

⁸⁴⁵ FO371/94825-NS1021/74, lecture for the Joint Services Staff College, ‘Basic factors in Soviet policy: The Communist state in theory and practice’, 6.10.1951.

⁸⁴⁶ FO371/94819-NS1021/4, Dixon note, 6.1.1951.

⁸⁴⁷ FO371/94815-NS10114/19, FO, ‘Soviet foreign policy: Brief for the UK deputy on the North Atlantic Council of Deputies’, 3.7.1951.

⁸⁴⁸ FO371/94819-NS1021/3, FO, ‘Estimate of Soviet intentions of there is no general settlement with the West’, 1.1.1951.

⁸⁴⁹ FO371/94819-NS1021/3, FO, ‘Estimate of Soviet intentions of there is no general settlement with the West’, 1.1.1951.

⁸⁵⁰ Ovendale, *British Defence Policy*, pp. 73ff.

⁸⁵¹ Bartlett, *British Foreign Policy*, p. 83.

⁸⁵² Bullock, *Ernest Bevin*, pp. 50ff.

⁸⁵³ FO371/94819-NS1021/4, Nicholls, ‘Analysis of current Soviet policy’, 6.1.1951; see also FO371/94820-NS1021/16, FO note on Stalin interview, 17.2.1951.

Soviet Union would present a real danger to Western unity.⁸⁵⁴ However, the Soviet government, in the opinion of Kelly, had severely underestimated the strength of European recovery and the progress of consolidation as well as the moral strength of the Western populations.⁸⁵⁵ To sustain a consistently high pressure on the governments and peoples in Western Europe while trying to balance a massive capital investment programme and increased rearmament in the Soviet Union was a hugely difficult task. To keep the emerging worldwide Communist movement from fracturing was another immensely difficult task. As a result, Western opportunities to fight back were only going to increase.

Trying to stay focused while reassuring allies and fostering new relationships, the Northern Department periodically reassessed the international situation to test new ideas and incorporate new developments. Just before the ministers of the four allied powers met in Paris to discuss a possible solution to the German problem the Northern Department produced a paper to prepare the delegates. Much of the focus is on Cold Warfare, presumably because the Soviet government was unlikely to make real concessions but would try to use the meeting to further its aims of division and procrastination. While the opportunity to reach an agreement could not be dismissed out of hand, the real risk that the talks would break down and result in a propaganda victory for the Soviets was all too real.⁸⁵⁶ 'Political aggression' covers, the paper argued, 'all those aspects of Soviet policy which make up the Cold War...[it] is the chosen instrument of the Soviet leaders for bringing about world revolution.' The main techniques in this were 'propaganda, support of subversive elements in active rebellion or aiming at a coup d'état, diplomatic and economic sanctions, aggression by proxy.' Propaganda furthermore included the Cominform, the Communist parties and the World Peace Movement.⁸⁵⁷

Reacting to possible intervention and manipulation on so many different levels was truly challenging and the delegates had to be aware of these potential problems. The objective

⁸⁵⁴ FO371/94825-NS1021/67, COS Committee note, 17.9.1951; the ND in a paper on 'Possible conciliatory moves by the Soviet government' argued that Britain had to be prepared to meet those moves, FO371/94845-NS1053/42, 16.10.1951.

⁸⁵⁵ FO371/94824-NS1021/55, Kelly, 'Soviet foreign policy', 20.7.1951.

⁸⁵⁶ FO371/94821-NS1021/24, FO, 'Soviet political aggression: Brief for the UK delegates to the preliminary Four Power conference', 27.2.1951; FO371/94834-NS1051/11, Etherington-Smith, 'Exchange of notes with the Soviet government about the Anglo-Soviet Treaty', 7.3.1951; FO371/94824-NS1021/63, Dixon, 'Soviet intentions and allied policy', 31.8.1951; see also Uffen's comment that Stalin still seriously underestimated the political bond between the USA, France and the UK, FO371/100851-NS1102/23, 3.10.1952.

⁸⁵⁷ FO371/94821-NS1021/24, FO, 'Soviet political aggression: Brief for the UK delegates to the preliminary Four Power conference', 27.2.1951.

for the Soviet Union, as the Northern Department saw it, was to 'exhaust all possible diplomatic, propaganda and subversive means of preventing West Germany's inclusion in the NATO defence system and to secure a neutralised Germany which might later be brought wholly under communist influence.'⁸⁵⁸ Kelly shortly after persevered with this point, writing that in his opinion there was a good chance that Soviet foreign policy was at a watershed.⁸⁵⁹ In a memorandum to NATO ministers the Foreign Office argued that it was absolutely vital that Europe was defended as far East as possible and that this, necessarily, had to include Germany.⁸⁶⁰ Vigilance in negotiations with the Soviets therefore had to be high.

Mirroring the Soviet attitude to world events, here mainly having the confidence, based on a prescriptive ideology (or in Britain's case a well defined foreign policy doctrine), to take a longer-term view, Roberts urged the Northern Department to do the same. He declared that 'if we are to survive...we must take a similar long term view of the road ahead.'⁸⁶¹ It would broaden the horizon and reduce the tendency to get over-anxious at every particular event. Since the West now had its own 'ideology' of containment it could afford, while not neglecting to react to certain events, to stand back and concentrate on progressing its overall plans rather than to be constantly held back by concerns over individual matters. Dixon agreed, noting that there 'must be no change in our basic policy', particularly with regard to the fact that the progress of the Soviet Union in Europe had been halted.⁸⁶²

Months later, just before the 19th Party Congress of the CPSU in October 1952, Morgan reiterated that argument, confirming that the Soviet leadership still envisaged a 'long period of Cold War.'⁸⁶³ In the absence of any promise of a relaxation in the international tension Britain had to remain determined. This was even more important against the background of increasing problems in implementing the agreed doctrines of Western foreign policy. Containment was more a theoretical concept than a doctrine that could be

⁸⁵⁸ FO371/94821-NS1021/25, FO, 'SWWPI', 1.3.1951.

⁸⁵⁹ FO371/94824-NS1021/55, Kelly, 'Soviet foreign policy', 20.7.1951; the same idea is also found in FO371/106504-NS1013/19, Grey, 'Soviet Union quarterly report' 8.4.1953, this time with regards to Stalin's death; others argued that this watershed was the signing of the Japanese Peace Treaty in San Francisco, FO371/94845-NS1053/35, RC, 23.8.1951.

⁸⁶⁰ FO371/106530-NS1023/43, FO, 'Brief for the ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council', 13.5.1953.

⁸⁶¹ FO371/94823-NS1021/52, Roberts, 31.5.1951.

⁸⁶² FO371/94824-NS1021/63, Dixon, 'Soviet intentions and allied policy', 31.8.1951; he was well aware of the fact that this policy would lead to problems with regards the standard of living in Britain.

⁸⁶³ FO371/100823-NS10110/12, Morgan, 4.10.1951.

flawlessly executed. Just like the Soviet government with its longing for world revolution and worldwide Communist control exercised by Moscow, so the West found that its policy ideas looked better on paper than in the real world. Democracy, protected at such a huge cost only a few years earlier, now came at a significant cost. To persuade the political establishments and populations alike, Western governments also had to resort to propaganda and the release of compartmentalised information. To provide a balanced picture which gave full attention to both sides was considered harm-full rather than politically necessary. The situation was therefore in flux and needed very careful attention. Gascoigne, writing from Moscow in the spring of 1952, came right to the point:

outside the NATO area there are wide gaps in our containment policy which show no signs of being filled...NATO itself is showing signs of considerable stress in attempting to convert political unity into military effectiveness.⁸⁶⁴

Disarmament, another area of intense Soviet interest, had captured the public imagination. Dixon, not mincing his words, proclaimed that 'to me [the purpose of] rearmament is that it places the club in the hands of a defenceless man threatened by thugs.'⁸⁶⁵ Two world wars and the effects of two atomic bombs had demonstrated how far the developments in the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction had come and how easy the practical use if them was. The emerging arms race, the relentless talk of war and peace, and the notable effects these developments had on public finances streamlined the public imagination. Although Western populations did by and large support their government's policies, the next crisis as well as the next elections always seemed just around the corner.⁸⁶⁶ The newly established UNO Disarmament Commission at once became a target for Soviet political warfare and manoeuvring. Particularly difficult to analyse and counter was the Soviet tactic of merging political demands with propaganda and ideological pronouncements.⁸⁶⁷

Should the Soviet Union succeed in banning atomic weapons, it would be a step further towards achieving overall Soviet military superiority as her conventional arms still

⁸⁶⁴ FO371/100825-NS1023/17, Gascoigne, 3.5.1952; on NATO see also FO371/106538-NS1071/106, Dixon minute, 26.5.1953.

⁸⁶⁵ FO371/100831-NS1026/31, Dixon comment on a paper by Kennan, 16.9.1952.

⁸⁶⁶ For FO concern about American policy after the next election see FO371/100836-NS10345/30, Watson, 10.10.1952.

⁸⁶⁷ FO371/100851-NS1102726, Grey, 'Memorandum on Stalin's article on the political economy', 16.10.1952.

outnumbered those of the West.⁸⁶⁸ In return for a reduction in and inspection of atomic weapons and facilities, the Foreign Office worried, the West might get nothing.⁸⁶⁹ ‘The main argument in favour of rearmament’, the Russia Committee argued, ‘was not that we expected the Russians to start a war...but that we were frightened of Russian policy creating a situation from which war could result.’⁸⁷⁰ If the most potent available deterrent the West possessed was effectively worthless the defence of the West would be substantially weakened.⁸⁷¹ An early end to this an all-out arms nuclear arms race would also, as the Northern Department was well aware, be hugely beneficial to the domestic capital investment plans of the Soviet government.⁸⁷²

A higher budget for the Soviet military and a lessening threat from the possible Western use of atomic weapons would also greatly enhance the fighting strength and confidence of the Soviet forces. In the Soviet Union internal and foreign affairs were arguably much more interlinked than in the West. Appeasement in the face of the various opportunities was unlikely and the 19th Party Congress had not really altered this picture or promised any significant relaxation in international tensions.⁸⁷³ There was still no fundamental change towards the governments of non-Communist countries and tactical cooperation was all that could be expected.⁸⁷⁴ Stalin, as Grey wrote during the 19th PC of the CPSU from Moscow, was confident that the Cold War so far had brought rewards and would continue to do so.⁸⁷⁵ He noted that ‘we must learn how to stick out a protracted struggle for predominance both in the economic and in the psychological field’; again demonstrating how far British foreign policy making still had to go to achieve its overall aims.

In these circumstances to anticipate, correctly interpret and manipulate, if possible, American foreign policy was an important strand of work in the Northern Department. Although mainly occupied with Soviet affairs, the American angle had become

⁸⁶⁸ For example, FO371/100827-NS1024/1, FO, ‘SWWPI’, 9.1.1952.

⁸⁶⁹ FO371/100827-NS1024/2, FO, ‘SWWPI’, 22.1.1952.

⁸⁷⁰ FO371/125006-ZP15/6, RC, 16.10.1952.

⁸⁷¹ Brimelow argued that the West’s possession of atomic weapons and NATO rearmament after the outbreak of the Korean War have curtailed Soviet military aggression, ‘Communism’s answer to the rearmament of the NATO powers’, FO371/100868-NS1192/1, 10.3.1952; the RC agreed, FO371/125006-ZP15/1, RC, 17.4.1952.

⁸⁷² FO371/100830-NS1026/3, FO, 31.1.1952.

⁸⁷³ FO371/100830-NS1026/3, FO, 31.1.1952.

⁸⁷⁴ FO371/100841-NS1052/14, Moscow chancery to ND, 5.3.1952.

⁸⁷⁵ FO371/100830-NS1026/30, Grey, 16.10.1952; see also FO371/100831-NS1026/32, Grey, ‘Survey of the international implications of the proceedings of the XIXth PC of the CPSU’, 23.10.1952.

increasingly important. Although the State Department included well-regarded experts like Kennan and Bohlen, there was no real confidence that it would choose policies which the British government favoured or even that it interpreted events with an open, well-informed and far-sighted mind. In the past, the US government had occasionally paid too much attention to Stalin's manipulative interviews or Molotov's poisoned diplomatic olive branches. When during the 19th PC of the CPSU some speeches hinted that the prevention of war was an aim of Soviet foreign policy and that the Soviet government was going to concentrate increasingly on internal affairs, the State department apparently was positively surprised. However, coming soon after the expulsion of Kennan, the American ambassador in Moscow, over an unfortunate comment in Berlin, Acheson was curiously over-optimistic.⁸⁷⁶ This was one example of the problematic ongoing capacity of even seasoned American politicians to elevate Soviet comments to policy announcements despite of a lack of concurrent actions.

In the other extreme, Kelly argued, the disappointments of Cold War diplomacy and the cost of rearmament led some in the US government to a very negative assessment of possible future policies which could require much emphasis on war in American internal propaganda and lead to a professed unwillingness to negotiate with the Soviet Union.⁸⁷⁷ The point was an important one: the West was now involved in a war on two fronts, at home and abroad. More worryingly for the experts in the Foreign Office, the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, had taken to making statements that suggested that Russia's aggression could now be countered much better despite their expressed doubts.⁸⁷⁸ That these statements could seriously weaken the determination to continued the British defence effort was a worry in the Northern Department.⁸⁷⁹

Kennan, well known and well regarded, nevertheless suffered in his policy analysis from the same problems as the Northern Department, namely the occasional lack of actual evidence for his conclusions. Kennan's views of NATO's importance, of the problems of implementing containment partly as a ring of NATO bases on the Soviet Union's outer rim and of the probable future course of Soviet foreign policy did ring true in the Northern Department. However, he was criticised for underestimating the ability of the Soviet

⁸⁷⁶ FO371/100830-NS1026/30, Grey, 16.10.1952; more files on the incident in FO371/100836.

⁸⁷⁷ FO371/94845-NS1053/43, Kelly, 'Final despatch', 20.10.1951.

⁸⁷⁸ FO371/125006-ZP15/1, Warner, British ambassador to Brussels to P. Dixon, 17.4.1952.

⁸⁷⁹ See FO371/125006-ZP15/1, Dixon note, 17.4.1952.

leadership to put themselves into Western shoes and for arguing a case too theoretical to be completely persuasive.⁸⁸⁰ Acheson, argued Makins, 'did not regard Kennan as an oracle in general policy but he might regard him as an oracle on the Soviet Union.'⁸⁸¹ However, his real importance, argued Watson from Washington, was that Kennan's view had real gravity in Congress, the Pentagon and elsewhere, and as a result he had made sure that the views of the State Department were heard. Kennan's recall as American ambassador to Moscow thus weakened both the State Department and Acheson himself.⁸⁸² At a time when the USA had taken over from Britain as being the country most consistently attacked by Soviet propaganda a weakened State Department could well mean an ineffective or delayed foreign policy response to Soviet actions or provocations.⁸⁸³ That could potentially be hugely damaging to the whole Western defence and consolidation effort.

A real watershed moment, some in the Northern Department thought, may have arrived on March 5th, 1953 when Stalin finally died.⁸⁸⁴ If this opportunity for both sides would amount to much nobody could foresee. Jebb, the veteran British diplomat, noted that 'I am sure that something is stirring on the other side of the curtain though what exactly it is I have no idea.'⁸⁸⁵ Only a few weeks prior to Stalin's death Gascoigne had written that the Soviet government had 'slammed all doors to the West', after Vyshinsky had treated the UNO to another of his venomous speeches.⁸⁸⁶ Nevertheless, this was an opportunity unlikely to return any time soon. As a result there was a pronounced willingness on both sides to at least listen to any proposals the other side had to make. Churchill's proposal for a high-level conference, however, met with a lukewarm response not by the Soviets but by both the Americans and the experts in the Foreign Office.⁸⁸⁷ They argued that there was real doubt if the new leaders could or even wanted to make concessions which would

⁸⁸⁰ FO371/100831-NS1026/31, comments by Hohler, Mason, Dixon and Gascoigne on Kennan, 'US views on Soviet foreign policy', 16.9.1952; also FO371/125006-ZP15/3, Kennan, 'The Soviet Union and the Atlantic Pact', 1.10.1952.

⁸⁸¹ FO371/100833-NS1028/11, Makins, RC meeting minutes, 29.11.1952.

⁸⁸² FO371/100836-NS10345/30, Watson, 'Recall of Mr. Kennan', 10.10.1952; the RC argued that State Department opinion was significantly influenced by both Kennan and Bohlen, FO371/94845-NS1052/40, RC, 1.10.1951.

⁸⁸³ For example, FO371/100830-NS1026/30, Grey, 16.10.1952.

⁸⁸⁴ Stalin's death was announced on March 6th, 1953; FO371/106504-NS1013/19, Grey, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 8.4.1953.

⁸⁸⁵ FO371/106525-NS1021/36, Jebb, 28.3.1953.

⁸⁸⁶ FO371/106524-NS1021/8, Gascoigne, 9.1.1953.

⁸⁸⁷ FO371/106505-NS1013/27, Moscow, 'Soviet Union weekly summary', 28.5.1953; FO371/106524-NS1021/8, Gascoigne, 9.1.1953 and the ND's response; Hohler noted that the Americans were not considering a Four Power meeting, FO371/106533-NS1051/21, 17.3.1953.⁸⁸⁸ FO371/106524-NS1021/21, Hohler, 16.3.1953.

demonstrate a new Soviet foreign policy.⁸⁸⁸ Malenkov's statement that 'at the present time there is no question...which cannot be decided by peaceful means on the basis of mutual agreement of the interested countries' did not persuade the British ambassador that a real change in Soviet foreign policy could be expected.⁸⁸⁹ All the talk was simply a matter of calming the tumultuous waters of international diplomacy. The main danger, argued Gascoigne, here again revealing the deep-seated anxieties about the strength of the new 'special relationship', was that the American government would give up on the idea of containment.⁸⁹⁰ Without the USA, it seemed, there would be no effective resistance against Communist expansion in East and West.

For the British caution was to be the word of the day. The attitude of hoping for the best while planning for the worst remained intact. Nevertheless, the opportunity to settle outstanding issues and thus permanently reduce international tension could not be ignored completely. In 1952 Connelly had warned that there was a danger to overlook real chances of negotiation because of the Soviet ineptitude to tailor its vocabulary to its ideas when looking for even a slight *détente*.⁸⁹¹ Although hopes to achieve anything meaningful and worthwhile appeared slim, the Northern Department did not neglect this opportunity.⁸⁹² The consensus was that the Soviet government should take the initiative and let the West see its hand before the West would reciprocate. Gascoigne, eloquently, noted that 'the Russians can easily make further gestures of they really mean business – they are not dumb and we are not deaf.'⁸⁹³ Any lessening of the Cold War, however grudgingly afforded, would be appreciated by both sides. The defences in the West, nevertheless, should not be lowered. Believing that Molotov was 'pulling the wool' over the eyes of the West, Gascoigne warned that the Western defence and rearmament effort had to continue unimpeded. These olive branches, he went on to warn, were poisoned. But while acknowledging the inherent danger of a relaxation of the Western defence effort, he nevertheless admitted that opportunities presenting themselves for negotiations should not be neglected.⁸⁹⁴ It was to be a case by case analysis of motives, costs and benefits for each side. This would invariably take time when there might not be any but it would also

⁸⁸⁹ FO371/106524-NS1021/23, Gascoigne, 20.3.1953.

⁸⁹⁰ FO371/106515-NS10110/33, Gascoigne, 6.3.1953; the USA, in the event of the talks failing, was according to a ND memorandum likely to step up the Cold War very quickly, 'Future policy towards Russia', FO371/100825-NS1023/8, 12.2.1952.

⁸⁹¹ FO371/100868-NS1192/1, Connelly, 10.3.1952.

⁸⁹² FO371/106524-NS1021/23, Gascoigne, 20.3.1953.

⁸⁹³ FO371/106524-NS1021/23, Gascoigne, 20.3.1953.

⁸⁹⁴ FO371/106524-NS1021/29, Gascoigne, 26.3.1953.

safeguard British interests and future plans. The Northern Department had already advised to exercise caution: 'we should show great reserve in our dealings with the new Soviet regime...at the same time we do not wish to add to their suspicion and self-created isolation.'⁸⁹⁵ One may doubt here whether the Soviet government regarded themselves to be in diplomatic isolation. The balance sheet in East and West could well be adjusted to suit different occasions. Stalin, after all, had been the supreme master of political manipulation.

What could be achieved were, as before in times of fleeting *détente*, small scale or local agreements. Bigger issues such as Germany, Korea or disarmament were unlikely to benefit from this cooling of tensions. Austria, on the other hand, was a much simpler and therefore possibly more worthwhile case and, if there was a choice, Korea was more urgent than Germany.⁸⁹⁶ Once the new government was able and ready to negotiate a list of specific issues could be advanced to test the water. For Britain this meant problems such as the Anglo-Soviet fisheries agreement, the George Bundock case, the case of the last Soviet wife Mrs Hall, a reduction in the restriction of movement of foreigners in the Soviet Union or a new Sterling-Rouble exchange rate.⁸⁹⁷ As banal as this list may appear now, these were matters of real importance to Britain and matters which would relatively easily show how far, if at all, the new Soviet government was prepared to make concessions. Strang noted in a slightly defeatist tone that 'the list of topics is indeed very thin. This is because Anglo-Soviet relations, in their bilateral aspect, are themselves very thin.'⁸⁹⁸ Here, in a short few words, was the admission of the severity of the problems of diplomacy with the Soviet Union. Even if Britain had wanted to, the basis for immediate expansive negotiations just was not there anymore. As it turned out, Mr. Bundock was allowed to leave the Soviet Union, Mrs Hall was refused an exit visa, the fisheries agreement was extended and movement of foreigners was, for a short time, less restricted; the exchange rate, however remained for the moment unchanged.

⁸⁹⁵ FO371/106533-NS1051/15, Hohler minute, 12.3.1953; FO371/106537-NS1071/30, Mason agreed, 16.1.1953.

⁸⁹⁶ FO371/106538-NS1071/61, record of tripartite meeting to discuss future policy towards the Soviet Union, 25.4.1953.

⁸⁹⁷ Gascoigne discussing issues that could be raised at his proposed interview with Molotov, FO371/106534-NS1051/38, 29.4.1953; FO371/106534-NS1057/51, Gascoigne report of his interview with Molotov, 26.6.1953; on the Soviet wives see also FO371/106505, FO371/106526, FO371/94800.

⁸⁹⁸ FO371/106537-NS1071/40, Strang note, 28.3.1953.

Churchill's call for a Four Power meeting might well have been an attempt to test this apparent good-will a little further and with higher stakes.⁸⁹⁹ The Northern Department consistently argued that the German question with regard to Western European defence and the German Contractual Agreements had to be dealt with first in order to have a solid basis for British policy prior to any further agreements on Germany with the Soviet Union.⁹⁰⁰ A possibly very fleeting détente was not enough to alter this basic assumption. It was true, as Hohler argued, that 'a few swallows do not make a summer.'⁹⁰¹ A draft message from the Prime Minister to President Eisenhower was more direct: 'the basic determination of the Bear to bring us down remains unaltered.'⁹⁰²

The flurry of excitement and busy-ness that followed Stalin's death did not immediately add up to actual or important advances in Anglo-Soviet relations. Apart from the issues mentioned above, it became clear that the Soviet government was very wary of being 'ganged up' on by a united USA and Britain. *Colliers*, the American magazine, had not helped when it had published, in November 1951, a whole issue devoted to an imaginary attack on the Soviet Union. The pictures in particular had probably sent shivers up of most of American and British, and possibly Soviet, spines.⁹⁰³ While smaller agreements could still be reached, more difficult negotiations bearing that risk were much difficult to get off the ground.⁹⁰⁴ Since any discussion on Europe was beset with difficulties, more agreements could possibly be reached with regards to South-East Asia, in particular the Korean War. Here was a genuine opportunity for both sides to withdraw from a conflict that had exhausted all potential benefits.⁹⁰⁵

13.2. Discussing options

The assessment of Britain's position and future options provided a mixed picture. Western strength and consolidation had undoubtedly increased and would continue to do so for the foreseeable future. However, it had come at the price of sacrificing a fully independent

⁸⁹⁹ Although Churchill could by now not simply override German apprehensions about deals made without them.

⁹⁰⁰ For example, FO371/106537-NS1071/32, Roberts minute, 23.3.1953.

⁹⁰¹ FO371/106537-NS1071/40, Hohler, 28.3.1953.

⁹⁰² FO371/106537-NS1071/41, draft message by the FO for the Prime Minister to the US president, 10.4.1953.

⁹⁰³ FO371/94803-NS1013/30, Moscow, 'Soviet Union weekly summary', 23.11.1951; copies of the actual magazine are in FO371/94832-NS10345/17.

⁹⁰⁴ FO371/106538-NS1071/106, Nutting, 26.5.1953.

⁹⁰⁵ FO371/106538-NS1071/106, Roberts note, 26.5.1953.

British foreign policy to the whims and national obsessions of other nations. It had also and would continue to demand a massive financial effort at a time when the population was getting used to new ideas of social security and a partly nationalised managed economy. Furthermore any important moves in the diplomatic sphere had to be discussed if not agreed with the United States.⁹⁰⁶ 'At all costs', Dixon wrote in May 1953, 'must we avoid a break with the USA such as would be brought about by HMG going it alone.'⁹⁰⁷

The bout of international meetings, discussions and negotiations reflected the fact that the Korean War with all its problems and implications had provided an opportunity to come together and finally agree on a common Western policy towards the Soviet Union. Of course, the more countries were involved and the more ideas were floated, the more difficult this task became. Nevertheless, there was possibly a new confidence that the first steps had been taken and that from now on the constant bullying by the Soviet Union could be countered in unison. The successes of not only integrating both West Germany and Japan into the Western group of nations but also rearming them while clearing the way for Greece and Turkey to join NATO were major foreign policy successes for Britain and the US. The theoretical rivalry between the blocs enshrined in Communist ideology had become a practical rivalry now taken very seriously by both sides. Not surprisingly Grey wrote in a letter in September 1951 that 'we must in any case recognise that we have approached a crucial and possibly dangerous period when the Soviets are fully alive to what is happening and we are not yet fully prepared.'⁹⁰⁸ The line between confidence, over-confidence and recklessness was a thin one and had to be watched at all times.

The basic assumption of British foreign policy makers remained negative on the assumption that the Soviet government was not interested and would not invest in a real improvement of Anglo-Soviet relations.⁹⁰⁹ Firmness and consistency in British foreign policy would only be matched by a similar attitude on the Soviet side. The status quo appeared to be to sit in a trench and peek out occasionally to see if the air had cleared. Some argued that the old Soviet idea of creating revolutionary situations to exploit them was still intact. NATO, it was thought, had forced Stalin to be more cautious but

⁹⁰⁶ For example, FO371/106537-NS1071/41, FO, 'High level talks', 10.4.1953.

⁹⁰⁷ FO371/106538-NS1071/106, Dixon note, 26.5.1953.

⁹⁰⁸ FO371/94825-NS10217/71, Grey, 28.9.1951.

⁹⁰⁹ FO371/94808-NS1015/83, Gascoigne, 5.12.1951.

essentially no less opportunistic.⁹¹⁰ A more active approach was needed. Containment on the American side had been paired with the Western idea of situations of strength. While the gap in conventional armaments was still so large (atomic weapons were expensive, could be used only in very serious circumstances and were likely to fall under UNO inspection at some point in the future) these situations of strength could be built up to allow the negotiation of limited local settlements.⁹¹¹ These would take time to build up but would equally be part of a longer-term view of the Cold War. To concentrate exclusively on defence arrangements was anyhow unlikely to be useful in most circumstances. Moreover, Britain's financial situation left little room for manoeuvre.⁹¹² A more varied Western response was needed, in particular with regard to the Foreign Office assessment that the Soviet leaders tended to underestimate rather than overestimate their strength.⁹¹³ Co-existence provided an overall concept that was flexible to suit various circumstances and as much as this idea lacked a really positive note, was seen as the momentarily only realistic way of conducting international relations in the Cold War.

Peaceful-coexistence as a concept was not new. It has in essence been in place since 1945, or even 1917 as some would argue, and although it offered not much apart from the prevention of a global war, this lowest common denominator in international relations would prove enough in the long run. Recognising that this rhetoric without costing much could sway the public and political imagination, the Soviet government in another episode of minimal détente opted to publish a new journal. *News* was to concentrate on two vital issues: Peaceful Co-existence and the importance of East-West trade. By taping into the anxieties of various groups in different countries the Soviet government hoped to capitalise on any potential slackening of the increasing anti-Communist and anti-Soviet feeling in the West.⁹¹⁴ Peaceful co-existence, however, was highly sensitive to changes in the international balance of power. When, during the Korean War, Chinese troops achieved well-publicised victories, the tone was inadvertently downgraded to suit the new confidence. By the end of 1951 Connelly not surprisingly noted that it was time to review the use of that concept by the Soviet leadership. Commenting on an article by Deborin, which discussed Soviet foreign policy, she argued that the article 'confirms the aggressive

⁹¹⁰ FO371/106531-NS1024/1, FO, brief for the Secretary of State on 'Policy towards the Soviet Union', 30.1.1953.

⁹¹¹ FO371/94808-NS1015/83, FO, 5.12.1951.

⁹¹² A. Gest, 'We must cut our coat according to our cloth: the making of British defence policy, 1945-1948' in Aldrich, *British Intelligence, Strategy and the Cold War*, ch. 6.

⁹¹³ For example, FO371/94823-NS1021/52, Roberts' note, 31.5.1951.

⁹¹⁴ For example, FO371/94825-NS1021/75, FO to Grey, 4.9.1951.

implications of the Soviet connotation of 'peaceful co-existence' and means in effect that the Kremlin claims the right to immobilise resistance to its policies within foreign countries through the paralysis of their man-power, disaffection, civil war etc.'⁹¹⁵ Gascoigne, writing from Moscow, agreed. 'When the Soviet authorities talk of peaceful co-existence', he argued, 'they mean not co-existence without conflict but only co-existence without major wars.' Still, the only alternative according to him was World War III.⁹¹⁶ With such an analysis of a political concept it could be assumed that it would mean the end of it. However, it had captured the public imagination and without a workable alternative the Foreign Office had no choice but to pay attention to it.

To tie up loose ends and provide a coherent argument Brimelow, of the Russian Secretariat of the Moscow embassy, drafted a memorandum on Peaceful Co-existence.⁹¹⁷ Reiterating the points above he argued that as a tactic it was of doubtful usefulness but in the absence of an alternative it was the only concept so far to form the basis of a non-aggressive international diplomacy. The Russia Committee went a step further and noted that 'the peaceful co-existence of the Socialist and Capitalist systems means ...a period of active rivalry and competition.'⁹¹⁸ Several months later this point was boiled down to one basic assessment when Morgan argued that the Cold War itself essentially equalled peaceful co-existence.⁹¹⁹ The Soviet government would only accept this concept and promote it if other avenues of political or subversive activities had either been exhausted or were momentarily unavailable.⁹²⁰ Thus it was a stale-mate rather than a genuine wish to use time, effort and money to rebuild the world after the last war. In actual fact, Brimelow argued, Peaceful Co-existence was 'the advocacy of provisional non-belligerence.'⁹²¹ Even the concept of peace could not get away from the vocabulary of war.

In the absence of progress in Europe the signing of the Japanese peace treaty in 1951 signalled a final end to the post-war settlement in the Far East. The signing, alongside of the peace treaty, of a bilateral American-Japanese defence pact reignited Soviet and

⁹¹⁵ FO371/94848-NS1071/8, Connelly minute, 15.12.1951.

⁹¹⁶ FO371/94848-NS1071/8, Gascoigne, 15.12.1951.

⁹¹⁷ FO371/94848-NS1071/8, Brimelow, 'Peaceful co-existence', 15.12.1951.

⁹¹⁸ FO371/100847-NS1072/1, Russian Secretariat, 'Peaceful co-existence', 7.1.1952.

⁹¹⁹ FO371/100823-NS10110/12, Morgan, 4.10.1952.

⁹²⁰ For example, FO371/106528-NS1022/1, RC, 'TCP', 3.1.1953.

⁹²¹ FO371/106540-NS1073/1, Brimelow, 13.1.1953.

Chinese fears about Western, and in particular American, intentions, in the Far East.⁹²² While Germany was divided, the Western part of the country was now well on the way towards complete integration into the Western political and defence system and now Japan had also chosen a side. Thus the two most important aggressors of World War II were firmly attached to the West. As a result NATO would have access to air and naval bases on the outer rim of the Soviet Union. Soviet policies with regards to Korea and Japan had decidedly failed. The repercussions were immediate and prolonged. Local wars and the stirring of national sentiments against colonial oppression were assisted by both the Soviet and the Chinese governments. As the opportunities for overtly offensive action was slowly reduced the West still had to fear subversive and covert fifth column activity. The Foreign Office concentrated on keeping all the strands of thought together. It prepared memoranda for important meetings of Western governments and advised NATO on Soviet history, ideology and foreign policy. Importantly, the Northern Department also reiterated its basic objective: 'we stand firmly by the principle of settling our differences by negotiation.'⁹²³ However, not at any cost. Pure propaganda exchanges were of no interest to the British and neither were very public meetings with unknown outcomes. They held onto their belief that more could be achieved in private.

The old idea of a psychological offensive against Stalin and the Soviet Union was in the light of this new Western confidence revisited. Particularly the State Department was interested in implementing it. A long US draft on the 'Psychological offensive vis-à-vis the USSR: Objectives, tasks, themes' was circulated in the Foreign Office in early 1951.⁹²⁴ While many welcomed the idea of a much more active, and offensive, approach to dealing with Soviet propaganda and Soviet inspired propaganda there was widespread disagreement particularly about specific objectives and the detailed implementation. The American view that the Soviets did not understand the nature of propaganda and admired

⁹²² See FO371/94825-NS1021/4, FO, Joint Services Staff College lecture 'Basic factors in Soviet policy: The Communist state in theory and practice', 6.10.1951.

⁹²³ FO371/100825-NS1023/5, Hohler, 16.1.1952.

⁹²⁴ FO371/94831-NS10345/4, State Department, 'Psychological offensive vis-a-vis the USSR: Objectives, tasks, themes', 1.2.1951; FO371/94831-NS10345/8, State Department, 'An analysis of the principal psychological vulnerabilities in the USSR and of the principal assets available to us for their exploitation', 27.4.1951; FO371/94832-NS10345/11, State Department, 'US policy towards a future liberated Russia', 17.5.1951, this document discusses the future of Russia after a defeat in war; the British effort to start a discussion with the Soviets took the form of an article by Morrison published in Pravda on August 1st, 1951, in FO371/94835, FO371/94836, FO371/94837; Pravda's reply is in FO371/94837 and FO371/94838; the IRD at the same time was preparing a pamphlet on rearmament to be released to the public in an effort to explain British policy to the wider public, FO371/94844-NS1053/25, 7.5.1951; General Bedell-Smith headed a Psychological Strategy Board which included representatives of the CIA, State Department and Pentagon, FO371/100825-NS1023/8, 12.2.1952.

Stalin as a demi-god was discounted in the Northern Department. But even more importantly there was real hesitation about whether the USA, and Britain for that matter, would have the political will to match the Soviet style or to find a new equally powerful one. According to Morgan one major problem was, as the IRD had also found in the previous years with regards to British policy makers, that 'if it is argued that the Americans are simply proposing to fight the Russians at their own game, then my reply would be that even American publicists are too gentlemanly to have any success at that.' The use of political warfare as an actual weapon was still in its infancy in the West and the willingness to 'get dirty' was very low. So rather than attack Stalin, or any other leader, it was important, Willetts pointed out, to 'attack the scientific pretensions of Soviet Marxism.'⁹²⁵

Since Soviet foreign policy was openly based on Marx's ideas of historical materialism it made sense to attack this basis and thus withdraw the much claimed legitimacy of Soviet foreign policy from the Soviet government. The British, however, were still rather reluctant to sanction overt, aggressive and offensive propaganda to deter Soviet and Communist propaganda. Many, like Churchill, favoured the softer option of a return to great power top level meetings. As discussed previously, the Foreign Office was not in favour of this approach. However, an idea by the head of the government could not just be discounted. Strang suggested the alternative of a discreet meeting presumably under the auspices of the UNO.⁹²⁶ A lengthy discussion followed but in the end no such meeting took place. The icy relations between the former allies were the single most important brake on progress in the UNO and post-war European reconstruction but by 1951 no government was willing to pay a big price for an improvement of those relations.

To understand those problems better from the point of view of the Soviet government a new 'Kremlin memorandum' was written by Nicholls.⁹²⁷ The first, written in May 1950, although heavily discussed and by no means accepted unequivocally, had been a success.⁹²⁸ Now there was another attempt to see the world through Soviet eyes. As usual,

⁹²⁵ FO371/94831-NS10345/4, Willetts note on 'Psychological offensive vis-a-vis the USSR: Objectives, tasks, themes', State Department Document, 1.2.1951.

⁹²⁶ FO371/94841-NS1051/129, Strang, 9.11.1951.

⁹²⁷ FO371/ 94821-NS1021/26, Nicholls, 'Kremlin Memorandum', 23.2.1951; also FO371/94843 and FO371/100868-7435.

⁹²⁸ FO371/86754-NS1052/48, 'Foreign policy through the looking glass' (the Kremlin Memorandum), 20.5.1950.

evidence was in short supply but guess work was a well-worn and accepted path in the Northern Department. The Russia Committee, in charge of shorter-term policy analysis, endorsed the paper.⁹²⁹ Whether or not the committee conclusions would be proven to be right, it argued, was irrelevant. What was important was to take a step back and imagine how the Soviet leadership could possibly view certain events and which actions they might take. The view was that the Soviet government would use all means at her disposal to achieve her aims. It saw the UNO as an American tool and would probably be much more careful in sanctioning or starting wars in the future. Western resistance had not changed but modified Soviet strategy and tactics.

About a year later Brimelow, then in Moscow, wrote a similar paper discussing Soviet resistance to NATO.⁹³⁰ One of the most experienced Soviet specialists in the Northern Department he took on a topic of vital importance to both the US and Britain. NATO was the centre piece of the Western resistance and rearmament effort and was likely to find itself permanently in the Soviet firing line. The better the detailed Soviet concerns and likely accusations could be worked out in advance, the more time the West would have to tailor specific responses to Soviet allegations. Brimelow argued that Stalin's pronouncements on present and future Soviet policy could be taken at face value and that NATO would not stop the eventual worldwide triumph of Communism. Agitation and propaganda, revolution and civil wars would be the main instruments of Soviet and Communist policy. According to him the Soviet leadership believed that the tide was slowly turning in favour of more revolutions and that the only two reasons for Soviet hesitation to take full advantage of the situation was the American atomic bomb and the continued rearmament of NATO. In the absence of any real hope of a negotiated settlement, essentially precluded by Soviet ideology, the West had to remain active and determined since the maintenance of the present policy of firmness and of consensus of opinion in the Western countries would be just as big a problem as dealing with any military problems. Eden, possibly not surprisingly, complained that Brimelow had been too negative in his assessment of potential progress but agreed that the hopes for a settlement were slim. A final, important, word of warning came from Connolly and it is worth quoting her in full as she pointed out one of the major problems of the later Cold War:

⁹²⁹ FO371/ 94821-NS1021/26, RC notes on the 'Kremlin Memorandum', 23.2.1951

⁹³⁰ FO371/100868-NS1192/1, Brimelow, 'The Communist answer to the rearmament of the NATO powers', 10.3.1952.

Soviet theoretical pronouncements on foreign policy are on the whole so dogmatic and uncompromising that there is a danger, especially in the present period of intransigence, that spectacular compromises possible to the Kremlin when they have seen the red light, either at home or abroad, may be momentarily overlooked.⁹³¹

Compromises on both sides required a certain confidence that the other side was willing to negotiate honestly and in the thick haze of Eastern and Western propaganda that willingness might well be overlooked.

13.3. Implementing British foreign policy

The British government had no problems justifying its policies to itself but acknowledged the necessity to pay attention to educate the public. She was a great power, possessed a still impressive empire and Commonwealth, she had remained undefeated on the victorious side in both World Wars, she had been pivotal in the organisation of post-war Western European recovery and thus had to remain strong and armed.⁹³² Without Britain the Western European defence effort would falter. Western rearmament, as an IRD pamphlet argued, was not the end but the beginning. In rather Churchillian sentiment it reassured its readers that ‘we...will survive long after the present menace has gone the way of all tyrannies and become an evil dream.’⁹³³ With this status, however, came huge responsibilities and significant financial commitments. In addition, Britain had to avoid any suggestions that rearmament was necessary for an unavoidable war. Negative propaganda was dangerous. Britain therefore had to appear positive and confident that the much talked about war was never going to break out. Importantly, as the Moscow chancery noted, confidence was good ‘provided we keep our powder dry and have enough of it.’⁹³⁴ British foreign policy therefore had not only to protect Britain and her achievements but it also had to be sustainable in the longer term. As a result the stakes really were very high and there was little room for mistakes or for uncomfortable manoeuvring with someone else’s (ie. American) foreign policy.⁹³⁵

⁹³¹ FO371/100868-NS1192/1, Connolly note, 10.3.1952.

⁹³² For example, FO371/106530-NS1023/43, FO, 13.5.1953.

⁹³³ FO371/94844-NS1053/25, IRD pamphlet on rearmament, 7.5.1951.

⁹³⁴ FO371/94848-NS1071/4, Moscow chancery, 6.6.1951.

⁹³⁵ For example, FO371/100825-NS1023/8, FO, ‘Future policy towards Russia’, 12.2.1952; FO371/100825-NS1023/11, Franks, Washington, 1.3.1952.

Containment and rearmament were not only designed to impede further Soviet progress at the expense of Western freedoms but were also intended to build up what Acheson called situations of strength. By the summer of 1951, Harrison argued, the idea was already proving promising.⁹³⁶ Others disagreed; Uffen noted that ‘in my opinion we are not yet really practising a policy of containment – or rather are not yet able to do so.’⁹³⁷ He thought that what the West needed first of all was to sufficiently counter-balance Soviet military strength; a view also held by Gascoigne.⁹³⁸ The British expanded the American concept of containment and strong point defence by starting to concentrate on Soviet ‘sore spots’. The idea was to analyse Soviet foreign policy and identify potential problem areas. Those areas could then either be targeted through specific pressures to elicit a Soviet response or they could be essentially protected from any such intervention so as to make sure that disagreements in those areas did not escalate into a wider conflict. A meeting in Strang’s room on February 22nd, 1952 discussed the first paper on this idea.⁹³⁹

Six years on from the Long Telegram Kennan had essentially been proven right. The Soviet Union had emerged as the main opponent to the US and containment now had become official American and British policy. The debate was quite fierce. There was a real disagreement between the Secretary of State and the Foreign Office. Eden worried that the conclusions increased the risk of war. Strang argued that one point of the paper was to inform and warn the COS about these particular danger points. He knew that high-level politico-military talks with the Americans were needed and that Britain had to identify, prior to any such talks, potential areas of disagreement as well as those areas where agreement was most likely. Detailed strategic planning within and out-with NATO following the doctrine of containment would necessarily need to take into account any areas where implementation would prove either problematic or outright dangerous.⁹⁴⁰

The memorandum itself started with one simple proposition: the West, under the leadership of the US, would soon be in a stronger position to push a more forward policy vis-à-vis the Soviet bloc.⁹⁴¹ Since this would restrict independent British moves, the

⁹³⁶ FO371/94850-NS1073/19, Harrison, 31.7.1951.

⁹³⁷ FO371/100840-NS1052/6, Uffen note, 1.2.1952.

⁹³⁸ FO371/100840-NS1052/6, Uffen, 1.2.1952.

⁹³⁹ FO371/100825-NS1023/13, FO, ‘Sore spots’, meeting in Strang’s room, 22.2.1952; also in FO371/100825 and FO371/100826.

⁹⁴⁰ See also FO371/100825-NS1023/17, Gascoigne, 3.5.1952.

⁹⁴¹ FO371/100825-NS1023/13, FO, ‘Sore spots’, 1.3.1952; FO371/100840-NS1052/6, FO, 19.2.1952.

Foreign Office should assess the situation and its potential implications while there still was a chance to influence the State Department.⁹⁴² The second important assumption was that any pressure applied to these sore spots was likely to increase the risk of war but that a more forward policy towards the Soviet Union could not afford to avoid these spots. Since Western military consolidation was to increase and since that would act as a deterrent to and brake on Soviet expansionism, the amount of pressure applied could progressively be increased.⁹⁴³ However, although the Soviet Union did not want war, it might resort to it if sufficiently provoked and exactly that remained the worry of Eden. So, as if to justify Western policies, the Northern Department again made a point of labelling them as 'defensive and non-aggressive.'⁹⁴⁴ The sore spots specifically identified included Germany, Austria, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan, with Afghanistan being the only one where foreign intervention of any kind was unlikely to be tolerated under any circumstances. As opposed to these actual geo-political sore spots, other problematic areas highlighted were the atomic bomb, and economic and psychological warfare.

A major problem in assessing these issues was not only the dearth of reliable evidence but also the ongoing paucity of actual face-to-face diplomatic relations with Soviet diplomats. The less contact there was the less British diplomats were able to gauge Soviet sensitivities and intentions. How to deal with this was a difficult issue. Grey suggested to reduce contacts with the Soviets even further so as to reduce the ability of the Soviet government to harm the British. Hohler argued that this would be highly dangerous.⁹⁴⁵ His argument was not new. Reduced contact made it more likely for the Soviet government to draw the wrong conclusions with regards to Western intentions. Further isolation of the Soviet Union was not beneficial to anyone. Isolation would only increase paranoia and the willingness to sanction desperate policies. Grey summarised the argument in a memorandum discussing the issued of how to deal with the Russians in the future in February 1952. Advocating a tougher line he argued essentially against Northern Department opinion. Britain, according to him, should use the methods of the Soviet government against them. He noted that 'basically our containment of the Soviet Union will work, not by making the Kremlin ready for concessions, but by inducing them to adopt a more cautious and conservative policy.'⁹⁴⁶ Implying that a reduction in

⁹⁴² For example, FO371/100825-NS1023/11, FO, 'Policy towards Russia', 1.3.1952.

⁹⁴³ FO371/100840-NS1052/6, Dixon note, 1.2.1952.

⁹⁴⁴ FO371/100825-NS1023/18, FO, 'Sore spots', 6.6.1952.

⁹⁴⁵ FO371/100838-NS1051/5, Hohler, 20.2.1952.

⁹⁴⁶ FO371/100838-NS1051/5, Grey, 'Cold War Policy', 20.2.1952.

negotiations could be a viable alternative to Soviet diplomatic games, he implicitly suggested that armed strength was the only way to make the Cold War safe; a 'policy of unconcern' he called it shortly after.⁹⁴⁷

Many, however, in the Foreign Office agreed that as tiresome as dealing with the Soviets was, in the UN for example, the alternative was in actual fact dangerous. Dixon argued that 'I believe that we ought to employ precisely the opposite technique.'⁹⁴⁸ Channels of communications had to be kept open in all circumstances. An end to negotiation could well spell the end to a safe Cold War. Zarubin had even told Eden that it believed that diplomacy could well lead to an improvement in international relations.⁹⁴⁹ Roberts felt that Grey had been too negative in his assessment and that the paper therefore lacked confidence.⁹⁵⁰ All in the Northern Department agreed on one issue, however, whatever tactics were chosen to best pursue British foreign political interests, continuity was vital. British policy had to remain focused on the two main issues: to provide a military deterrent against Soviet aggression and to ensure that the Soviet idea of Western collapse in the Cold War would not occur. Britain had to remain open to discussion and negotiation, and aim for the settlement of local problems. Patience, continuity and unity as well as psychological warfare were the means to achieve this end. Even then, a Northern Department paper noted, 'it will probably be years before there is any chance of going over from 'containment' to active 'compression' without undue risk.'⁹⁵¹ The Soviet Union, of course, faced similar problems. Morgan noted quite rightly that 'the Soviet government like ourselves have to walk along a razor's edge.'⁹⁵²

The whole discussion has to be understood against the background of Western military consolidation, especially NATO. With the increase in NATO's capabilities and extent Western governments felt, not surprisingly, safer and more confident; peace through strength, as some put it.⁹⁵³ Military security, however, was likely to reduce the willingness of some to solve problems the old-fashioned route, through diplomacy. A deterrent was unfortunately not the best means to produce a longing for détente on either side and further

⁹⁴⁷ FO371/100838-NS1051/14, Grey, 14.4.1952.

⁹⁴⁸ FO371/100838-NS1051/5, Dixon, 20.2.1952.

⁹⁴⁹ FO371/100838-NS1051/20, Eden to Gascoigne, 10.6.1952.

⁹⁵⁰ FO371/100841-NS1052/13, Roberts, RC minutes, 1.4.1952.

⁹⁵¹ FO371/106531-NS1024/1, FO, brief for the Secretary of State, 30.1.1953.

⁹⁵² FO371/100847-NS1072/1, Morgan, 7.1.1952.

⁹⁵³ FO371/125006-ZP15/1, RC, 17.4.1952.

concentration on the extension of Western strategic capabilities would reduce the probability of that happening even further. Brimelow discussed this important point in a paper.⁹⁵⁴ It was essentially a catch 22. He argued that there was

no prospect that, when the NATO rearmament has reached its peak, it will be possibly to negotiate a settlement with the Communist bloc. The hope of a settlement is precluded by the Communist ideology of conflict...There is no prospect of the NATO powers being able to negotiate from strength with the Soviet government...the latter...will not be intimidated.

One might wonder why then rearmament was seen as so important not only for self-defence but also for negotiation. Eden, not surprisingly, disagreed with Brimelow, feeling that he had been too negative. Interestingly, however, he agreed with the near impossibility of negotiating a lasting settlement with the Stalinist government. According to him all that could be hoped for were, again, local and limited settlements.⁹⁵⁵ The Soviet Union had certainly noted the increased Western defence abilities which had greatly enhanced military and psychological strength to resist further Soviet encroachment. Overconfidence on the part of the West, nevertheless, as the Russia Committee noted, was to be discouraged.⁹⁵⁶ Military intimidation, as Kennan had noted in a long memorandum, was a vital part of the Kremlin's forcefulness with regards to the West.⁹⁵⁷ Without it a major pillar of Soviet foreign policy would be gone; another reason why the Soviet government possibly continued the arms race against all the odds and perhaps against better judgement.

Propaganda, as a relatively inexpensive but efficient means of political warfare, was often discussed in the Northern Department. The more the Soviet Union and other Communist countries and international organisations used this means to full effect, the more Britain had to come to terms with the use of it. To leave the initiative completely to the Soviet Union was lazy and, in the long term, damaging. Educated populations might well start to wonder why their governments did not reply in kind to the continuous barrage of Soviet accusations. Equally importantly, Western populations had to be brought solidly on board with regards to their governments policies, their imaginations had to be fired and the Cold

⁹⁵⁴ FO371/100868-NS1192/1, Brimelow, 'The Communist answer to the rearmament of the NATO powers', 10.3.1952; see also the naval attaché's letter in FO371/100900-NS1691/1.

⁹⁵⁵ FO371/100868-NS1192/1, Eden letter to Gascoigne, 10.3.1952.

⁹⁵⁶ FO371/125006-NSZP15/1, RC, 17.4.1952.

⁹⁵⁷ FO371/125006-ZP15/3, Kennan, 'The Soviet Union and the Atlantic Pact', despatch to the State Department, 1.10.1952.

War explained in a way that would retain their allegiance in all eventualities. As an unnamed official in the Northern Department noted 'the free world badly needs to be shown some light at the end of the rearmament tunnel.'⁹⁵⁸ Therefore a positive, more aggressive and more offensive propaganda campaign was needed. Although this was never going to be more important than actual foreign policy initiatives, it was an important secondary tool.

What was needed was a great idea that would capture the imagination of the free world and that exactly, as already discussed, was the problem. Propaganda by definition is rather boring, lecturing and prescriptive and thus not entirely suited to the educated and free minds of the West. A more offensive and manipulative propaganda was advocated by the British Naval Attaché in Moscow Captain Fitzroy. Arguing that the Soviet Union was trying, through false propaganda, to portray a picture of Soviet strength onto the West thus forcing the West to rearm, he suggested that Britain through clever propaganda provocations could possibly force the Soviet leadership to reveal more about their preparedness and actual strength than it initially wanted to.⁹⁵⁹ Noting that a possibly unnecessary Western rearmament could potentially cripple the West economically, in his view one of the main reasons for this projection of Soviet strength, he called for a review of what British propaganda should address and how it should be done.

Stalin's death on March 5th, 1953 in these circumstances was both a problem and an opportunity. Although Soviet foreign policy was not entirely predictable a certain pattern had emerged since the war in Soviet responses to certain situations and problems. Stalin had essentially guaranteed that a specific level of hostility would not be increased and had thus helped to stabilise the Cold War. Even if Berlin and Korea had shown how thin the international consensus on wishing to avoid war was, military opportunism had remained confined to very localised areas. Although the discussions about factions in the Kremlin and questions about Stalin's mental abilities had continued, he had remained the figurehead of both the Soviet Union and worldwide Communism. It was unavoidable that as a result of this a certain predictability had also been cemented. Problematic now was that the new men arriving on the international scene were, mostly, not recognised as

⁹⁵⁸ FO371/94849-NS1072/3, unnamed official, 26.9.1951.

⁹⁵⁹ FO371/100900-NS1691/1, Captain Fitzroy Talbot, Naval Attaché, 'Soviet policy and military security', 28.2.1952.

prominent Soviet faces. All had been central to Stalin's policies of the previous years but none had, in Western eyes, either real leadership potential or Stalin's iron will and determination.⁹⁶⁰ To govern a country with such an immense variety of nationalities as well as to push through a capital investment programme and to continuing to engineer a social revolution on a massive scale while keeping the international Communist movement together required undoubtedly an outstanding leader.

To reflect the increasing Soviet self-confidence and Soviet foreign political ambitions against an ever more consolidated Western opposition demanded even more specialist skills. With Molotov lacking the absolute will to power, Malenkov and Beria both possibly restricted by their experience in a field too narrow for broad appeal and support (in the Party and the NKGB respectively), and with Kaganovich and Khrushchev seen as rough trouble shooters rather than leaders, the Northern Department necessarily resorted to speculation. Junior men like Kosygin, A. Kuznetsov, Popov, Suslov or Ponomarenko were deemed even less likely to climb the dangerous Soviet leadership ladder any time soon. Older members of the Politburo, men like Mikoyan, Voroshilov or Bulganin, had not really been at the forefront of national policies for some time. In the end, Malenkov emerged in the Foreign Office as the most likely candidate to lead the committee that was likely to rule until a supreme leader had emerged. New leaders potentially meant new policies or at least a modification of existing policies. The Western excitement about this prospect, however, was very limited. It appeared unlikely that Stalin's death would in the intermediate term offer spectacular opportunities. Nevertheless, even a limited settlement in Korea, Austria or in the international disarmament talks would be well worth the effort.

Gascoigne, not surprisingly, reported that the second quarter of 1953 was of 'vital interest' to Western observers.⁹⁶¹ A certain tension had arisen not because of actual problems with the new Soviet leaders but because many in the West argued in different directions about potential Soviet moves and their motives, and thus split the previously fairly coherent Western thinking about them. One certainty, Gascoigne argued, was that the Soviet Union had entered a probably limited period of collective leadership and that the 'cult of the outstanding individual' had ended. In order to consolidate their power and ensure a safe

⁹⁶⁰ For example, FO371/106530-NS1023/43, FO, 13.5.1953.

⁹⁶¹ FO371/106505-NS1013/34, Gascoigne, 'Soviet Union quarterly report', 9.7.1953; also FO371/106530-NS1023/47, FO, 'Developments since Stalin's death', 9.6.1953.

transfer of responsibilities it was likely that the new leaders would actively aim for a détente and would offer limited solutions to outstanding problems. When Churchill, on May 11th 1953, argued in a speech that the ‘security of the Soviet Union was not irreconcilable with the freedom and safety of Western Europe’ and, again, suggested a Four Power meeting the door had been opened a little further for a return to traditional diplomacy negotiating solutions to the benefit of all participants.⁹⁶²

The ambassador made his thinking about the disappearance of Stalin from the international scene very clear: ‘I do not, repeat do not, look with satisfaction on Stalin’s disappearance’, he wrote on the day Stalin’s death was announced.⁹⁶³ He, like others, was extremely worried about potential instability within the Soviet Union which could spread across the globe. Stalin, he noted, had understood the West and had provided a point of contact should it be needed. Others were more optimistic with regards to both Western and Soviet abilities to deal with Stalin’s death calmly and make the best use of opportunities were they arose. Wahnerheide, in Germany, argued that ‘the illness and death of a potentate might become the turning point in the Cold War.’⁹⁶⁴

Anxiety, opportunism and optimism were therefore clearly visible in East and West. The situation was not completely surprising, Stalin had been seventy four at the time of this death, but speculation about a particular event, his death, and dealing with it when it actually arrives proved two completely different matters. British fears about American resolve vis-à-vis the Soviet Union immediately resurfaced, although there was no real evidence that the State Department considered a change to the policy of containment the Northern Department was worried.⁹⁶⁵ The Soviet leaders, by the same token, were in reality unlikely to make substantial concessions.⁹⁶⁶ Any détente was seen as probably short-lived and very limited. ‘All our actions vis-à-vis the Soviet Union’, Gascoigne warned, ‘should be tempered with great caution at this delicate moment in Soviet history.’⁹⁶⁷

⁹⁶² FO371/106505-NS1013/34, Gascoigne, Soviet Union quarterly report, 9.7.1953.

⁹⁶³ FO371/106515-NS10110/12, Gascoigne, 6.3.1953.

⁹⁶⁴ FO371/106515-NS10110/25, Wahnerheide to FO, 7.3.1953.

⁹⁶⁵ FO371/106515-NS10110/33, Sykes note and Gascoigne letter, 6.3.1953.

⁹⁶⁶ FO371/106524-NS1021/23, Gascoigne, 20.3.1953; FO371/106526-NS1021/64, Connolly, ‘A summary of indications of Soviet intentions since the death of Stalin’, 3.6.1953.

⁹⁶⁷ FO371/106524-NS1021/23, Gascoigne, 20.3.1953.

Coherence and determination in foreign policy remained a vital basic ingredient for the Foreign Office. In any case, it was argued, it was unlikely that the new leadership was able or willing to offer anything new while they were consolidating their hold and, presumably, figuring out who was to be supreme leader. Soviet policy would not change overnight, and neither would Western policy. Despite all this caution there were real opportunities to ease the Cold War tension. With Stalin's death, a change in the administration in the US and an explicit willingness of the British Prime Minister to talk all sides kept their options open. This first sense of hope of a possible easing of the Cold War tension was quickly squashed. In late April, assessing Soviet foreign policy and possible intentions Gascoigne wrote from Moscow that unmistakably 'the Soviet government will not accept threats, reproaches or preliminary conditions and that they remain true to their previous policies.'⁹⁶⁸ The much wanted détente was possibly nothing more than a figment of the Western imagination. Real concessions, so far, had not been made and with no new supreme leader in place, were unlikely to be made in the near future. 'The Soviet leopard has not changed its spots', as a Northern Department official noted.⁹⁶⁹

Two months after Stalin's death the Russia Committee moaned that a rapprochement had not been achieved.⁹⁷⁰ Concessions, in general, are made from a position of strength and confidence and neither West nor East was sufficiently convinced that such a position had been achieved on either side yet. The flow of low-level conciliatory moves by the new Soviet leaders, such as the release of Bundock, the signing of the Anglo-Soviet fisheries agreement etc, had by May slowed down considerably. Although diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia as well as Israel had been re-established, really significant moves had not been made on either side. The Northern Department advised to wait and see but to be prepared; the Soviet leadership would still do anything short of war to improve its position and secure its hold over the country and the Eastern bloc.⁹⁷¹ Britain, just like the Soviet Union, had to remain firm, realistic and willing to negotiate if that situation arose. It also had to be aware that any increase in Soviet suspicions or her isolation were not only unwanted but could also negate any opportunities for new talks. Gascoigne summarised the situation: 'I think that great patience, deliberation and astute

⁹⁶⁸ FO371/106537-NS1071/51, Gascoigne, 25.4.1953.

⁹⁶⁹ FO371/106538-NS1071/106, unnamed official, 26.5.1953.

⁹⁷⁰ FO371/106528-NS1022/6, RC, 'TCP', 2.5.1953.

⁹⁷¹ FO371/106530-NS1023/43, FO, 13.5.1953.

diplomacy will be necessary in the future if we are indeed to profit at all by the ray of sunshine which the new administration has shed upon the scene.⁹⁷²

The lack of a prime Soviet contact remained a problem. Now that there was a choice, although Malenkov as chairman of the Council of Ministers was the senior Soviet party leader, foreign diplomats and governments were in uncharted waters. Even more problematic was the low-level discussion in the West on a possible power struggle. This made the choice of a first contact even more difficult. The US State Department was certain that such a struggle was taking place. The British were more hesitant.⁹⁷³ In the end, it was all speculation with no actual evidence. That evidence only arrived with the arrest of Beria and the shuffling of positions between the leaders afterwards. A long Northern Department minute from May 1953 discussed this issue.⁹⁷⁴ Whether or not there was a power struggle going on behind the scenes, Churchill was, as always, not afraid to voice his opinion. Talking to Gromyko, who was now Soviet ambassador in Britain, he noted that 'I felt much safer while Stalin was alive. I was five years older than he was and sure old men were not likely to make war.' Referring to his visit to Moscow in October 1944, the scene of the infamous 'Percentages Agreement', he stated that he regarded that time as the 'highest level we ever reached.'⁹⁷⁵ Reading these words now, one cannot help but be surprised by both Churchill's naivety and his still obvious love of great power diplomacy. Backroom deals with other leaders had always been a particular love of his.

Long expected and now widely evident, the Cold War had by the early 1950s definitely arrived. Several low key military struggles as well as the first war after 1945 raised the stakes for the British Foreign Office. Long debates and some bitter experiences during the years since 1945 had substantially reduced Britain's choices in international relations. Close relations with the USA as well as a formal alliance in NATO became the cornerstones of British foreign policy. They also, however, limited the options should the Kremlin choose to pursue détente. Stalin's death and the ensuing discussion in the Northern Department demonstrated how far this deadlock had actually proceeded. Trying not to give anything away while continuing to look strong meant no side was really going

⁹⁷² FO371/106534-NS1051/38, Gascoigne, 'Interview with Molotov', 29.4.1953.

⁹⁷³ For example, FO371/106525-NS1021/51, Sykes note, 16.4.1953.

⁹⁷⁴ FO371/106530-NS1023/43, FO, 'Brief for the ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council', 13.5.1953.

⁹⁷⁵ FO371/106533-NS1051/8, FO, note of a meeting between Churchill and Gromyko, 24.2.1953.

out of its way to make the first substantial step towards an indication that renewed negotiation was in fact very much desired.

Some in the Foreign Office found these developments puzzling. Germany, the old enemy, was now the new friend, while possibly fruitful relations with the former wartime ally, were reduced to a minimum as the assessment gathered momentum that the Soviet Union was now the new enemy. At the time of Stalin's death, although there may have been opportunities, this seismic shift in Soviet domestic affairs proved of limited impact to the outside world. Although many by no means were friends of the Soviet Union, some realised that low key cordial relations would have been the cheapest option for Britain to maintain peace and avoid being dragged into a very expensive and highly disadvantageous arms race with both the USA and the Soviet Union.

Part Five. Conclusion

Proximity to information gave Northern Department staff a prime opportunity for suggesting those policies to the Foreign Secretary and the Cabinet they regarded as most beneficial for British interests at the time. Often things were, however, not that straightforward. Information had to be accurate, up to date and relevant to pressing issues in order to be useful. But the collection of it from the Moscow Embassy and various departments outside the Foreign Office, such as the JIB, took time. Extensive debate in the department and the Foreign Office in general with papers moving up and down the hierarchy took time as well. While British foreign policy up to May 1945 had been geared towards winning the war and securing some basic planning for a pacified Europe, after 1945 there were a large number of issues all of which were urgent and had to be addressed. The Soviet Union was, although very important, initially only one of them. Problems regarding the Empire, and imperial security and communication as well as financial discussions with the USA were of equally pressing importance.

Only with the slow breaking-down of the CFMs and the resulting stagnation in the settling of important post-war issues did it become clear that the Soviet Union had become central to the achievement of workable settlements in Europe and elsewhere. Massive efforts on part of the Foreign Office to be prepared and potentially flexible in these negotiations met with only limited results and the realisation that actual negotiation with the Kremlin, the offering of deals, for example, was seen as a weakness to be exploited by Soviet negotiators. As in the absence of war between the former allies the use of military power was essentially impossible, this reduction in the use of old style diplomacy was a major hindrance in achieving a post-war settlement that was acceptable to all sides. The movement towards a close cooperation with the USA, also in the wake of an increasing financial dependence on the country, hinted at the formation of a bloc perceived to be threatening to the emerging Soviet empire in Eastern and South Eastern Europe by Stalin. To a surprising extent both sides mirrored each others moves with each side occasionally taking the lead.

The historiography of these crucial early years after 1945, during which some Cold War patterns were set and slowly solidified, is extensive and divided. Mostly focusing on the higher level of policy formation in the Cabinet it has largely neglected those Foreign Office departments, like the Northern Department, which have played a crucial role in the initial process. When officials are mentioned the argument usually follows the main

historical debates. While orthodox historians have been lenient with the foreign policy establishment in the wake of putting most of the blame for the deteriorating international relations on the Soviet government, revisionist historians have argued a different case. Seeking to balance the discussion by attributing some deserved blame for these problems mostly on the USA but also Britain, they necessarily had to be more critical of Foreign Office suggestions and attitudes. Most importantly it was the resurrection of the British role in the context of the Cold War which put the Foreign Office firmly in the spotlight. Here criticism has been severe with some post-revisionists arguing a very critical case against the Foreign Office.

Officials in the Foreign Office in general and the Northern Department in particular have, as this thesis has shown, not received the respect that they actually deserve. Far from being narrow minded 'Cold Warriors' or 'russophobe' officials these men through diligent analysis of the available information proposed those policies they regarded as most efficient to achieving British foreign policy ambitions and most suitable to Britain's undeniably weakened position vis-à-vis her two former wartime allies. Although the impact of personal opinions and experiences on these decisions is very difficult to quantify, it is much more likely and obvious in the sources that eventual suggestions were based on good analysis, extensive discussion and a good dose of pragmatic realism. In-depth knowledge of previous relations with both the Soviet Union and the USA was another important factor in decision making.

Information here was key. Despite unsurprisingly significant gaps in the availability of information on several issues, the overall knowledge of Soviet domestic affairs was good. The basis of the regime, its ideology, its mechanism for maintaining its power and extending it to its new empire in Eastern Europe were well understood. Knowledge of Soviet industry and agriculture was despite the occasionally shaky interpretation of data equally good. It was a great help that these two issues in particular were widely reported and debated in the Soviet press. Here, as on other occasions, it is clear that the Soviet government underestimated the extent to which important information could be gleaned from relatively mundane press reports. There were problems with this way of gathering information, of course. Information vital to the Soviet military and atomic energy research effort, for example, were not addressed in the press. While there was a debate in the Northern Department as to the extent of this research and possible people involved, this

was necessarily guess work. If more detailed intelligence was available at the time, it was certainly not accessible to staff in the department.

Overall it is clear that new policy suggestions, like Warner's 'defensive-offensive strategy', the increasing push for more firmness vis-à-vis the Kremlin or a more confident and determined British propaganda campaign towards Soviet inspired Communism, were only advanced after long and detailed discussions in the Northern Department and the Foreign Office. All eventual policy proposals were always backed up by evidence and the reasons for these proposals were made clear throughout. While the COS were less than impressed with Foreign Office efforts at the time and historians have at times argued that the institution was too slow to adapt to new times, it is clear that this was in actual fact not true. Officials were keenly aware of the changed and still changing international scene and they adapted accordingly. They also realised that if the information relevant to British foreign policy was to be used in a way that would benefit Britain, it had to be the Foreign Office that needed to be in charge of the initial process of policy formation. The MOD and the Treasury, for example, argued their cases from a different point of view and were not privy to all the information the Foreign Office had. They could thus not be allowed to advance dangerous policies or hinder those that were seen as most suitable to achieve British aims.

The debate about the likelihood of war was a good example. While Churchill in his last days as Prime Minister had demanded a plan to deal with a possibly dangerous Soviet Union after the war, Operation Unthinkable, and the COS were understandably reluctant to let go of their newly found influence within the Cabinet, the Foreign Office realised from the start that these plans and attitudes were not only not implementable but potentially dangerous for British interests. While the role of foreign intelligence in Soviet decision making is still under researched and unclear, it is possible that Stalin, had he found out about Operation Unthinkable, would have had grave concerns and necessarily would have had to ensure a higher than planned military presence in the Soviet Union and the orbit.

Against this background of possibly questionable assumptions and perceptions the rise of an ideology such as Communism in an already anxious international sphere could not but aggravate existing problems. Although discussion of this ideology was extensive and much

information was available, there can be no doubt that because of its less tangible nature this threat was possibly over-estimated. Any hint that people could be turned against their democratically elected governments in the West as a result of extensive indoctrination through propaganda proposed a new kind of danger. While counter measures were being discussed and slowly implemented, it is rather understandable that Western governments sought to bring all their resources to bear in addressing this issue. Communist witch hunts as in the US in the early 1950s were not replicated in Britain. But the discovery of Soviet agents in the heart of the Foreign Office and the existence of a sizable group of Communist sympathisers in Britain meant that the threat of a Third Column could not be disregarded out of hand.

The edging of Communism closer to British borders with the successful building of a Soviet empire in Eastern Europe brought this threat very close to the British border. In the Foreign Office this necessarily caused concern. The determined and well argued demand for an effective British counter strategy, Western consolidation and propaganda, demonstrated the efforts of the Northern Department to make use of their information, expertise and policy suggestions. The difficulty in persuading first Bevin and then the Cabinet shows that major changes in British foreign policies were not taken lightly. Both, the Foreign Office and the British government, knew that new policies had to be solid as they would be difficult to change. Frequently changing foreign policies would have conveyed a sense of British dithering and weakness, an impression the Foreign Office was trying to avoid.

That the British government succeeded in persuading Western governments to take the threat emanating from Moscow seriously was partly based on the diligent work of Northern Department officials and Moscow embassy staff. Detailed analysis of often minute pieces of information yielded results that proved very usable for discussions in Cabinet, CFMs, meetings of NATO representatives or UNO General Assembly meetings. The more details emerged about the nature of the Soviet regime, and its occupation and consolidation policies in Eastern Europe, the more precise predictions of future Soviet policy aims and actions could be taken. Although the Korean War was unexpected, the problems arising out of the joint occupation of Berlin had long before the actual blockade indicated that such a move was likely. Outspoken Soviet demands ostensibly situated within the Peace Movement and the Cominform further enhanced understanding of the

Soviet regime and its ideology. Once the idea took hold that it was in actual fact following a pre-determined ideology which was intrinsically hostile to the Western world and its governments, foreign political choices for Britain were even more limited.

Faced with various Soviet actions across multiple fronts the Northern Department was one of the departments urging the establishment of a closer relationship with the USA and made huge efforts to solidify this relationship into a more formal alliance. Staff had realised soon after the end of World War II that any new international system would be based on strength, in particular military and economic power. The UNO was new and still had to prove its usefulness. In these circumstances British officials fell back on the old and trusted idea of alliance building to secure British interests. Rather than a move backwards it was a necessary move to maintain Britain's world role while she was trying to gather her strength after the exertions of the war. But Northern Department staff knew that rather than putting all their eggs into one basket, efforts had to be spread out. Between the UNO, NATO and a closer Western European cooperation British interests were much better served than would have been possible if the British government had solely concentrated on one idea alone.

Because the Soviet Union crept up in many policy discussions at the time, the Northern Department and its expertise were of vital importance in ensuring that appropriate and realistic policies were chosen to secure British interests. While they were as well informed as could be expected at the time, the information used by them to advance their arguments was not distorted to support arguments but rather in a matter of fact way. Of course, officials were interested in making sure that they were heard and that their views mattered but it is wrong to assume that policies advanced for consideration to the Foreign Secretary or the Cabinet were personal opinions. Foreign Office staff were servants of the state and understood their role as such. While they may have voiced their opinions in private notes and conversations, they were professional when giving advice to those who did not have an expertise or in-depth understanding of Soviet affairs. They were as much concerned with Britain's new role in the world as with maintaining as cordial relations with the Kremlin as possible. When facing the ultimate choice between aligning Britain with either the USA or the Soviet Union the Northern Department advocated the right and only choice, a closer relationship with the USA. Although staff recognised that the Soviet Union had legitimate security concerns, these could not be allowed to infringe on British concerns.

The Northern Department and its staff warrant much more research. Their dedication and vitally important work as well as the dearth of available literature on specific Foreign Office departments reveals an imbalance in the historiography on the Foreign Office. Taking and getting little credit for their work, officials worked tirelessly towards their aim of securing a continued world role for Britain. A very heavy work load, many hours of reading through at times tediously detailed reports in order to extract the most important and relevant information, and the willingness to use information and ideas that had come from outside the Foreign Office meant that Attlee and Bevin as well as Churchill and Eden could confidently argue their cases in debates with their foreign counterparts. British foreign political successes of the early post-war years were to a significant extent the result of the work of those much lower down the hierarchy in the Foreign Office, as well as other government departments. To resurrect these men, and some women, from obscurity greatly enhances our understanding of the Northern Department while making the reading of British foreign policies during the post-war years much more interesting.

Bibliographical information on Foreign Office staff

Staff at the Foreign Office served abroad as well as in London. The focus here is on their experience abroad, on positions relevant to the ND and the Moscow Embassy, and on senior positions in the FO. It is very difficult to secure details about more junior staff and the information provided here is therefore necessarily limited. All information was taken from *The Dictionary of National Biography*, the *Foreign Office List* and *Who's Who*.

Roger Allen

Born 17.8.1909, educated Repton, Corpus Christi, Cambridge

Entered FO April 1940

Served in Moscow 1946 to 1948

UK Deputy High Commissioner at Bonn 1954

AUSS September 1953

Sir John Balfour

Born 26.5.1894, educated at Eton and New College, Oxford

Entered FO April 1919, retired September 1954

Served in Budapest, Washington, Madrid, Sofia, Belgrade, Lisbon, Moscow 1943 to 1945

Ambassador Buenos Aires 1948 to 1951 and Madrid 1951 to 1954

William Barker

Born 19.7.1909, educated at Liverpool University

Based with the Intelligence Corps in Bletchley Park

Served in Prague 1945

In Moscow 1947-51 as Head of the Russian Secretariat

Ambassador to Czechoslovakia 1966

AUSS 1965

Slavonic linguist, 1956 acted as interpreter when Khrushchev and Bulganin visited Britain

Retired from FO 1968

Sir Charles Harold Bateman

Born 4.1.1892

Entered FO 5.1920

Served in Santiago, Bagdad, Lisbon, Cairo

Ambassador in Mexico City, then in Warsaw July 1950

SUS of the ND 1948 to 1950

AUSS January 1948

Thomas Brimelow

Born 25.10.1915, educated at Oxford

Entered FO 1938 as the first in the examination, retired November 1975

Served in Danzig, Riga 1939, New York, Moscow June 1942 to June 1945, Havana 1948-51, Moscow October 1951 to September 1954, Ankara 1954-1956, Washington 1960-1963, Moscow 1963-1966

Ambassador in Warsaw 1966-1969

Clerk in the ND 1946 to 1948

Head ND August 1956, DUSS 1971, PUSS 1973-1975

Sir Alexander George Montagu Cadogan

Born 24.11.1884, educated at Eton and Balliol, Oxford

Entered FO 10.1908, heading the list

Served in Constantinople, Vienna, China, UN 1945-46

DUSS October 1936, PUSS January 1938 to February 1946

Violet Connolly

Born 11.5.1899

Entered FO April 1943

Served in Moscow

Joined FORD November 1946

Advisor on Soviet affairs in the ND 1953

Sir Pierson John Dixon

Born 13.11.1904, educated at Cambridge

Entered FO 1929, as the second of the group

Served in Madrid, Angora, Rome

Personal Private Secretary to Bevin 1945

Ambassador in Prague January 1948, UK representative on Brussels Treaty Permanent Commission with rank of ambassador until November 1952

DUSS June 1950

Joseph Alfred Dobbs

Born 22.12.1914

Served in HM forces 1939-1945

Served in Moscow October 1947, appointed head of Russian Secretariat October 1950

J. Galsworthy

Born 19.6.1919, educated at Emmanuel and Corpus Christi, Cambridge

Entered FO August 1941

Served in Vienna, Athens

Clerk in the ND 1945 to 1946

Sir Alvary Douglas Frederick Gascoigne

Born 6.8.1893, educated at Eton

Entered FO 3.1919

Served in Budapest, Paris, Peking, Madrid, Oslo, Teheran, Tokyo, Budapest, Tangier

British Political Representative to Hungary 1945

Ambassador to Japan 1946 and to Moscow October 1951

Paul Grey

Born 2.12.1908, educated Charterhouse and Christ Church, Oxford

Entered FO October 1933

Served in Rome, Rio de Janeiro, The Hague, Lisbon, Moscow 1951 to 1954

AUSS September 1954

Hon. Robin Maurice Alers Hankey

Born 4.7.1905, educated at Oxford

Entered FO 25.11.1927

Served in Berlin, Paris, Bucharest, Cairo, Teheran

Charge d'affaires in Warsaw 1945 and Madrid from 49

Head of ND from March 1946 to 1949

Geoffrey Harrison

Born 18.7.1908, educated at Cambridge

Entered FO 20.10.1932

Served in Tokyo, Berlin, Brussels, Moscow 1949

Head of the ND 1950 to 1951

Sir Oliver Charles Harvey

Born 26.11.1893, educated at Cambridge

Entered FO 10.1.1910, retired 1954

Served in Rome, Athens, Paris

Seconded to the Ministry of Information August 1940

Ambassador in Paris January 1948

AUSS November 1943, DUSS February 1946

Sir William Goodenough Hayter

Born 1.8.1906, educated at Oxford

Entered FO 10.1930 as the third of the group, resigned 1958

Served at the League of Nations 1932, Vienna, Moscow 1934 to 1937, China, Washington

At the Potsdam Conference, then in Paris

Ambassador to Moscow October 1953 to February 1957

Chairman of JIC of the COS

AUSS February 1948

Henry Arthur Frederick Hohler

Born 4.2.1911, educated at Eton and the Royal Military College in Camberley

Entered FO October 1934

Served in Budapest, Berne, Helsinki and Moscow December 1949 to 1951

Head of ND October 1952 to 1953

Rt. Hon. Lord Archibald John Clark Kerr Inverchapel

Born 17.3.1882

Entered FO 22.3.1906, retired March 1948

Served in Berlin, Buenos Aires, Washington, Rome, Teheran, Tangier, Cairo, Guatemala

Santiago, Stockholm

Ambassador to Bagdad 1935, China 1938, Ambassador Moscow February 1942 to 1945,

Washington May 1946

Sir Hubert Miles Gladwyn Jebb

Born 25.4.1900, educated at Eton and Oxford

Entered FO 1924?, retired 1960

Served in Teheran, Rome

Private secretary to Robert Vansittart and Alexander Cadogan

Chief executive of SOE 1940-42, Head of the Economic and Reconstruction Dept.
Present at Teheran, Dumbarton Oaks, Yalta and Potsdam
1945 executive secretary of preparatory commission of UN, acting Secretary General
of UN at first UN meeting in February 1946 pending appointment of Trygve Lie
In June 1950 succeeded Cadogan as Brit rep at UN
Ambassador to Paris 1953-60
AUSS March 1946, DUSS February 1949

Sir David Victor Kelly

Born 14.9.1891, educated at Oxford
Entered FO 4.1919, retired October 1951
Served in Buenos Aires, Lisbon, Mexico, Brussels, Stockholm, Cairo, Berne
Ambassador in Buenos Aires, Ankara, and Moscow June 1949 to October 1951

Sir Ivone Augustine Kirkpatrick

Born 3.2.1897, educated at Balliol, Oxford
Entered FO 10.1.1919, retired 1957
In 1945 ran network of British agents operating in German occupied territory in the
Netherlands
Served in 1940 in the Ministry of Information
Served in Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Berlin
Seconded to BBC October 1941, British High Commissioner in Germany 1950-53
AUSS August 1945, DUSS January 1948, PUSS November 1953-1957

A. E. Lambert

Born 7.3.1911, educated at Harrow and Balliol, Oxford
Entered FO October 1934
Served in Brussels, Ankara, Beirut, Stockholm, Athens
Clerk in the ND 1947 to 1949

J. Y. Mackenzie

Born 13.1.1914, educated Kelvinside and Christ Church, Oxford
Entered FO October 1938
Served in Montevideo, Beirut, Chungking, Baghdad, Sofia, Athens
Clerk in the ND 1949 to 1950

Paul Mason

Born 11.6.1904, educated at Eton and Cambridge

Entered FO 11.1928

Served in Brussels, Prague, Ottawa, Lisbon, Sofia

SUS of the ND 1952 to 1953

AUSS April 1951

Christopher Paget Mayhew

Born 12.6.1915, educated at Oxford

Served with the SOE during WWII

Elected as MP in 1945, lost seat 1950

Under Secretary of State 1946

H. T. Morgan

Born 3.8.1919, educated Winchester and Magdalene, Oxford

Entered FO November 1945

Served in Moscow 1948 to 1950, Mexico City 1954

Clerk in the ND 1951 to 1953

J. Nicholls

Born 4.10.1909, educated Malvern and Pembroke, Oxford

Entered FO October 1932

Served in Athens, Moscow 1949 to 1951

AUSS July 1951

Sir Andrew Napier Noble

Born 16.9.1904, educated at Eton and Balliol, Oxford

Entered FO 12.1928

Served in Rio de Janeiro, Rome, China, Buenos Aires, Helsinki

AUSS September 1949

Sir Maurice Drummond Peterson

Born 10.3.1889, educated at Rugby and Oxford

Entered FO 30.12.1913, retired June 1949

Served in Washington, Prague, Tokyo, Cairo, Madrid, Sofia

Ambassador in Bagdad

Controller of Foreign Publicity at the Ministry of Information July 1940, resigned 6.1941,
Back in FO January 1942
Ambassador in Ankara November 1944 and Moscow January 1947 to 1949
SUS of the ND 1951

J. Pumphrey

Born 22.7.1916, educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford
Entered FO August 1945
Clerk in the ND 1946
Assistant Private Secretary to PUSS October 1946, assistant private secretary to Prime Minister October 1947 to 1950
Working for the Control Commission for Germany 1950 to 1953

E.A. Radice

Born 2.1.1907, educated at Winchester and Magdalene, Oxford
Entered FO January 1946
Served in Copenhagen
Clerk in the EID 1946 to 1948
Transferred to MOD 1953?

C.R.A. Rae

Born 20.2.1922, educated at Eton and Trinity, Cambridge
Entered FO July 1947
Clerk in the ND 1948 to 1950
Served in Rome

Sir Frank Kenyon Roberts

Born 27.10.1907, educated at Rugby and Cambridge
Entered FO 10.1930
Served in Paris, Cairo and Moscow January 1945 to 1947
Principal Private Secretary to Bevin January 1948
Deputy UK High Commissioner in India April 1949 to August 1951
Ambassador to Yugoslavia November 1954, to NATO February 1957, to the Soviet Union 1960 to 1962, to Germany February 1963 to May 1968
AUSS February 1949, DUSS October 1951

Sir Orme Garton Sargent

Born 31.10.1884

Entered FO 16.3.1906, retired February 1949

Served in Berne, with the Peace Delegation in Paris 1919 and in Paris

SUS of the ND 1945

AUSS August 1933, DUSS September 1939, PUSS February 1946

William Strang

Born 2.1.1893, Educated at UCL and in Paris

Entered FO 19.9.1919, retired 1953

Served in Belgrade, and in Moscow July 1930 to October 10.33

Acting AUSS November 1939, Joint PUSS German section October 1947, PUSS February 1949

Sir Christopher Frederick Ashton Warner

Born 17.1.1895, educated at Oxford

Entered FO 11.1920

Served in Constantinople, Teheran

Ambassador to Brussels February 1951

Head of the ND 1945, SUS 1946 to 1947

AUSS February 1946

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Northern Department files of that time were not compiled thematically. While sometimes documents dealing with a particular issue, such as British representation in the Soviet Union, were kept together, most of the time files contain documents on many issues. Specific reports, for example the 'Reviews of Soviet tactics' or the Russia Committee meeting notes, are thus distributed among a large number of files. For this reason it is impossible to list all the files used in this thesis and indicate the theme of each file. While detailed information on particular topics and documents is given in the main text of the thesis, a comprehensive list can unfortunately not be given here.

The Northern Department, the Foreign Office and the Moscow Embassy over time introduced a number of regular reports on specific issues. Following is a list which illustrates the breadth of interest in Soviet affairs.

Regular and serial reports

Monthly, quarterly and annual reports from the Moscow Embassy

Political Reviews of the Soviet Union

'Monthly Review of Soviet Tactics', later 'Review of Soviet and Communist Tactics'

'Soviet Union Fortnightly Summary'

Soviet Union Weekly Summary

'Trends in Soviet Foreign Policy'

'Summary of Indications of Soviet Foreign Policy'

‘Soviet Worldwide Policies and Intentions’

Chronology of Soviet Events

The Soviet Attitude to Communists in Foreign Countries and on Relations between the
Communist Party of the Soviet Union and those in foreign Countries

‘Trends of Communist Policy’

Annual Survey of Communism

Survey of Communism in Western Europe

Survey of Communism in Africa

Survey of Communism outside the Soviet Orbit

Review of Communism in the Colonies

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‘Trends of Communist Propaganda’

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